

Mounties called in to find gold

2009.06.10

OTTAWA - Canada's mint has asked the RCMP to help find its missing gold and silver after being told by the government to call in the Mounties.

The national police force confirmed late Tuesday it had received a letter from the mint about the discrepancy between the value of the precious metals on the Royal Canadian Mint's books and the stockpile at its Ottawa headquarters.

"The RCMP will review the information/allegations and make a determination as to whether there are sufficient grounds to investigate, and if the RCMP is in fact the appropriate law-enforcement agency to investigate this matter," said Sgt. Greg Cox, an RCMP spokesman.

The case of the missing metals deepened Tuesday as Rob Merrifield, minister responsible for the mint, revealed that an audit being conducted by the agency would not "be able to rectify all the missing - or believed missing - precious metals."

Merrifield said he instructed the mint to seek assistance from the Mounties after he received a preview of the audit findings.

The minister said he didn't know the value of the gold, silver, platinum and palladium in question. There have been unconfirmed suggestions the figure reaches into the tens of millions.

"I don't have the actual numbers," Merrifield said following Tuesday's Commons question period.

"The third-party audit will be completed hopefully this week. I'll make that public as soon as I can, as soon as I get it. I haven't seen it yet."

Liberal MP Joe Volpe expressed astonishment.

"Imagine, the RCMP is now being brought in because they can't reconcile the differences. There's only one reason: the government's been incompetent in handling this."

Mint spokeswoman Christine Aquino said the agency would not comment now that the matter has been referred to the RCMP.

Aquino said last week the accounting shortfall could be a result of anything from theft to poor record-keeping.