



Customs training hurts 146

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Defence Writer

THE Australian Customs Service has been forced to modify its "hands-on" self-defence training after 146 officers suffered injuries ranging from fat lips to broken bones during exercises.

They were undertaking so-called "defensive tactics" training following a 2005 decision to expand the number of Customs officers allowed to carry guns.

The 146 incidents, 20 involving females, occurred between November 2005 and December 2007 as officers learned how to defend themselves during a police-based "use of force" training course.

Customs received a "stop notice" from the government's workplace watchdog Comcare in January this year. It was revoked in April after the course was modified.

"We have reviewed the amount of person-to-person physical contact required," an Australian Customs spokesman said.

Since April another 28 injuries have been reported.

About 34 of the 146 incidents were regarded as "slight" and included injuries such as fat lips and soft tissue damage. Eleven involved people tripping over exercise mats, but six resulted in fractures to arms, fingers, knuckles and wrists and led to time off work.

The number of Customs officers carrying guns has expanded from just 200 in 2005 to 1000 today. The Howard government expanded the number of armed staff to include investigations officers, air and sea port patrol and security personnel.

The high injury level and Comcare's intervention barely rated a mention in the 2007-08 Customs annual report with just a single paragraph referring to the "non-compliance" notification.

"The prohibition notice was issued against the defensive tactics component of Customs use of force training," the report states.

Deputy chief executive for border enforcement Marion Grant said she was surprised that Comcare had shut down the course.

"Because the use of force course is designed as a safety training course to provide our officers with a safer set of skills for the high-risk environment in which they're working," Ms Grant told ABC radio.

Deputy president of the Community and Public Sector Union Michael Tull said the union was concerned about the level of injuries.

"We recognise it is strenuous and serious training but it appears the level of injuries remains unacceptably high and further work needs to be done," Mr Tull said. He said it was also worrying that Customs had ignored staff concerns and acted only after Comcare intervened.



Memoir: Peggy Sue Gerron, 68, Buddy Holly's Peggy Sue

Picture: Ross Schultz

Real-life Peggy Sue tells story

THE real-life Peggy Sue behind the Buddy Holly hit believes the late rocker's wife has always been jealous of the connection she had with Holly.

Peggy Sue Gerron is in the midst of a legal wrangle with Holly's widow, Maria Elena, over the publication of Gerron's memoir, *Whatever Happened to Peggy Sue?*

"I think it's a matter of jealousy," Gerron said yesterday. "Maria was not there when the music was written. And not only



Killed: Musician Buddy Holly

am I in one one song but in two. "Sure, there is some natural resentment there. She has her lawyer and I have mine."

As well as *Peggy Sue*, Holly wrote another tune called *Peggy Sue Got Married*.

Holly, whose other hits include *Rave On*, *That'll Be The Day* and *Oh, Boy!*, is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern rock music. Next year marks 50 years since he and fellow musicians Ritchie Valens and JP "The Big Bopper" Richardson were killed in a plane crash on February 3, 1959.

Gerron, 68, is in town to promote a musical about the bespectacled rocker, *Buddy — The Buddy Holly Story*. The jukebox musical opens in Sydney on February 3.

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