

From bodyguard services to protests to pipeline patrols: Experti Security Group

■ By Brian Zinchuk

Cochrane, Alta. – Do you have a VIP that might need protection? What do you do if you think protesters might picket your site? Do you suspect an employee of wrongdoing? How do you keep your equipment and material from “walking away?”

Two retired members of the Calgary Police Service created a company whose specialty is dealing with just those types of questions. Experti Security Group of Cochrane, Alta. is made of up Phil Rydl and Jim Amsing, plus numerous contractors as needed.

The company was started by Rydl in 2009, two years after he retired. It was initially a numbered company.

Rydl spent 25 years with the Calgary Police Service, finishing his tenure there as a detective. “Over half of my career was intelligence, drugs, counterterrorism and organized crime,” he said by phone on Jan. 22.

He led national and international organized crime projects.

“That work really led well to establishing service in the oilfield,” Rydl said.

He had been head-hunted by a bank to do risk-management corporate security. This included bodyguard service, upper level fraud investigation, procedural processes, and ensuring regulatory compliance.

Since then he’s served more than 25 different oil sector companies as a direct contractor or subcontractor. This includes executive protection, security vulnerability assessment, intelligence collection, security program development and deployment.

Rydl is the president and senior partner of Experti Security Group.

Amsing joined in 2012 as the junior partner. He was a police officer first in Edmonton in 1978, in Hinton for a short time, Edmonton again, and then Calgary after 1987. He retired in 2004 as a constable. Most of his career was spent as a street officer. He was a supervisor for the crowd control team, and was involved with the G8 conference at Kananaskis and Calgary in 2002, not long after the events of 9/11 changed security considerations the world over.

Amsing also had a short stint as an acting detective.

Crowd control is commonly referred to as “riot police.” That training included monitoring demonstrations and being ready to deploy. In the G8 case, it meant being prepared to react quickly to protests expected in front of oil company offices.

His crowd management experience also includes the visits of Pope John Paul II and Prince Charles and Princess Diana.

“Major crowd management is to deal with little problems before they become big problems. We would put out the fires before they became problems,” Amsing said.

That includes being “firm, but fair,” mingling with the crowd and trying to keep the peace.

Protests

When crowd control goes wrong, it can go really wrong, such as the APEC 1997 riots in Vancouver. Prime Minister Jean Chretien may have joked that, “Pepper, I put it on my plate,” but the repercussions of the RCMP’s use of pepper spray on protesters were real for years to come. Now, in a time when every proposed major pipeline is seeing fierce opposition, and First Nations protests in New Brunswick effectively killed the fracking industry there, protests cannot be ignored.

Rydl said, “Those incidents are incidents that can cause a lot of political and corporate damage. Jim and I are aware of the potential outcomes of incidents like that. What we try to do is position things, to have the intelligence, to put the proper safeguards in place to prevent them.”

Also they prepare the best ways to deal with them if these situations do come up.

“There’s a lot of forethought that comes from experience in managing incidents,” he said.

Rydl suggested searching Google for “opposition Northern Gateway Pipeline.” Doing so resulted in 155,000 hits.

“It is very concerning,” he said.

Monitoring protests is part of what they do.

“I think where we provide the most value is conducting the proper threat risk assessments before the event, identifying what the issues are, getting our intelligence assets positioned so that we have a current read as to what the issues are and what the thought processes behind the potential problematic factors are.

“In doing this we can provide a plan and recommendations to mitigate the potential of these events and diffuse them as they arise,” said Rydl.

“Oftentimes it’s a certain amount of communication between the oil company and a local band, for instance, that may be the key in preventing an issue (or dealing) with it once it does arise.

“But the proper threat risk assessment needs to be conducted. The client, in our case, the oil company-designates, the pipeline-designates, need to be know what the issues are and to be provided with recommendations to prevent these incidents before they get off the ground.

“Once they’re off the ground, absolutely we need to be present to continue to assess the situation and as things materialize, address the level of threat and implement risk-mitigation strategies. Also, we liaise with the police or the intelligence communities to ensure safety and adherence to the laws.

“We also position the client, the oil company or pipeline company, to prevent potential harm to their reputation. That may be by verbal engagement with the parties causing the protest or making their point. Or it may be in guiding them (the client) in making a public response to the public or the media. There’s different ways to get our message across that will either have positive repercussions or negative ones. We try to position for the positive.”



Phil Rydl, left, and Jim Amsing, both former police officers, are the principals behind Experti Security Group. *Photo submitted*

Prior to a protest, they would like to see the parties get into a boardroom and see if terms can be negotiated beforehand. If that can’t be reached, at least an agreement on how a protest can be done that is safe, secure and non-confrontational as a secondary goal.

But what about protestors with whom there is no reasoning?

Rydl said, “One of the methods is finding out who the higher level stakeholders are, having a pre-engagement meeting with them; ensuring they’re present so you have a certain amount of business and common sense that you can share viewpoints and come to respectful agreements.

“We would like somebody with status from the concerned party to liaison with people who are more difficult to communicate with.”

Aboriginal protests

In the wake of Oka and Ipperwash, First Nations protests have been treated differently compared to other protests, with police often reluctant to show a firm hand. What are their recommendations?

“This is something I am engaged with at this very moment. I’m engaged with conversations with leadership of a First Nations band right now. I won’t mention who they are. But those conversations are about determining what those concerns are, getting information out to the oil company as well as the First Nations about potential opportunities for both sides. (We’re) trying to find common interests and a win-win situation rather than a confrontation situation,” Rydl replied

“Our focus is to prevent a potential incident, or rally, or bad media attention for our clients. Our recommendation is to open up communication with the properly identified stakeholders that have the ability to make decisions in the best interests of both parties.”

A lot of their work is in mediation, intelligence collection and strategic recommendations. Rydl said, “If we do our job at the front end, it can save a lot of risk, a lot of money, a lot of additional security requirements and address safety needs. We can circumvent a lot of that. So our benchmark for success is one that is very hard to measure – the absence of an incident – rather than dealing with an incident that is well underway.”

Rydl agreed that the New Brunswick fracking protests were a no-win situation, one that would get a lot of negative attention. “If it’s not preventable, the best you can do is get your best intelligence, your risk assessment, find out how to best address the situation to the media and public, and contain your interaction with the protesting party. You are on full mitigation mode there instead of prevention. The risks can very high, and a no-win.”

Is the energy industry dealing with increasing numbers of no-win situations, be it pipelines or fracking in the east, where it is impossible to accomplish your goals without substantial negative interaction?

Rydl replied, “The challenges the energy sector is facing right now are enormous.”

Noting they’re highly regulated, reporting to everything from the National Energy Board to the Conservation Act and even the Criminal Code of Canada. It’s difficult and cumbersome to be compliant with all of these regulations. This means opponents can look under numerous legislative areas to find issue with. “This is why they require more understanding and expertise than just a regular security company. Most security companies will just put a guard out front to guard a certain piece of equipment or assets. However, what I would recommend to oil companies today

Mediation to prevent incidents from occurring

is to find service providers that are aware of the challenges the oil company faces, aware of the potential risks and pitfalls, and for those service providers to conduct their business in a way that best positions the client. To do that, they have to be experienced and dedicated at a very high level in some areas that are outside of their (typical) scope of experience,” Rydl said.

“If it’s a concern to my client, it’s a concern to me. Not only do I need to know the regulations with respect to providing security service, I need to know the regulations with respect to regulatory compliance related to my client so I can get the proper information, so they can make informed decisions, and we can conduct our business in a way that properly serves them in a broad spectrum.”

Who do you hire?

Rydl and Amsing deploy contracted resources as needed, bringing in people as needed. “We’ve got access to between 20 to 50 people depending on the project and timing,” Rydl said.

Amsing added, “Let’s say you have a protest, there’s all kinds of problems on site. What you want there is level-headed, cool, calm, collected people that can assess the risks at the site, that can deal with these heated emotions with compassion, but still professionally, without getting off-base with their emotions. That’s why we target retired police officers who have handled these situations in the past, retired military personnel who have had these situations in peace-keeping and combat situations.

“We try to keep people employed who can think on their feet, deal with emergencies in a proper way, and liaise with local authorities, who have the background to speak their language, and to manage their actions in a way that is as professional as you can get out there.”

More mundane work

While high-profile protests are a portion of Experti’s work, it’s not all of it. Far from it.

Rydl said, “The vast majority of our work would be risk mitigation – security risk assessments and security boots on the ground for instance, for a segment of pipeline operation.”

Intelligence collection plans are another portion of their work, as mentioned before.

In recent years they’ve done a lot of executive protection and security at annual general meetings for oil companies.

Executive protection isn’t just in the oilpatch. Rydl, for instance, worked as the security manager on an Elton John performance, which included the protection plan, extraction, and ensuring proper resources for the event. “It went without a hitch,” he said. “There were a lot of moving parts. It was a very high-risk situation, but it went very well.”

However, as is common in Canada, security personnel are not armed. Rydl said, “If the level is to such a degree that is required, we would engage the law enforcement community. We have the ability to put sworn peace officers or police officers in our contingency on a paid-duty basis. Can we procure that element? Yes we can. But Canadian law does not allow civilians to carry firearms unless special provisions are set out by the government.”

Amsing personally did this sort of work when he was off-duty while he was still a police officer. He recounted one instance when a prominent figure had retired U.S. Secret Service members as security, while Amsing was the “shadow guy carrying the weapon.”

Whereas Canadians in urban centres generally don’t bring firearms with them, in a rural setting such as a pipeline project, many people might have firearms for hunting. Some people have the right to hunt year-round.

“That’s why we want the right people who can diffuse a situation out in the field,” Rydl said.

What about the lone nut?

“The rate of incidents is low, however, when there is an incident, the risk is extremely high,” Rydl said. “I have been involved in those kinds of situations which involved surveillance of a potentially violent subject as well as attending court cases to be privy to the evidence to determine the level of threat.”

He’s also talked to Crown prosecutors and police to deal with legal court orders and police operations.

Those who have worked in an industry, say pipelines, are also familiar with its vulnerabilities. “We address that by knowing the client’s business, knowing about the pipeline, knowing enough to understand what the vulnerabilities are.”

They utilize project manager expertise to identify vulnerabilities.

Rydl’s been to many compressor and pumping stations, conducting penetration testing. “Security is poor, even if it’s there,” he commented.

He noted a company will typically hire a poorly-paid security guard with minimal training. “My recommendation is to have a highly-qualified security professional conduct an assessment, and implement a security plan that is outside of a uniformed security guard making \$18, \$20, at most \$30 an hour. I suggest prudent use of resources, but highly qualified people at your location.”

“Arming is not the solution. It is a tool in the toolbox. The best tools are the experience, the communication plan, your procedure, your ability to respond properly to deter it.”

Amsing noted there isn’t the political will to have armed guards in this country at this time.

There’s an even more fundamental level of security service Experti provides, preventing “leakage” is one. On a pipeline project that can be pretty severe.

“Stealing items off sites can destroy a company,” Amsing said. Rotating patrols and a uniformed presence can make a difference in preventing thefts of fuel and

other high value items from warehouses and along pipeline right of ways. At a recent pipeline project, would-be thieves were frustrated by their presence guarding a warehouse.

If you are present, visible and diligent, you will deter fuel theft, according to Amsing. “It’s going to put a crimp on them stealing stuff.”

Terminations

Sometimes a person just has to be let go. Experti has been involved in close to 200 high-risk terminations, providing evidence to support the firing.

“Sometimes our boots on the ground gives us the information to identify a problem employee and (cause for) a termination. When a company does make a termination, it should be made in a professional way, regardless of what their system is to mitigate liability, but also ensure they have all the (corporate) information (and property) like a laptop, entry keys, and access to company assets. Make sure those assets are harnessed in the termination process so the company is not at (further) risk.

An exit interview should include a check list to ensure assets are returned.

As former police officers, their presence can be imposing if necessary. “I’m six-foot-three and 245 pounds,” said Amsing.

Rydl said, “I’m five-foot 10, 195, but I am fit and well-trained. I’ve worked in the toughest assignments I can get my hands on, including undercover operations.”

“I don’t want to intimidate or scare people right away. It closes avenues and opportunities to reach a peaceful resolution. When I need to step up to the plate, I am noteworthy.”

Professionalism

“To wrap this up, we feel we bring a lot of experience and professionalism to this kind of work, and we demand that kind of professionalism and ethics from the people that work with us. In essence, we want to be viewed as a company that is honest, industrious, cutting edge and that is willing to give a good product to the clients that engage with us. You have to have the ethics and integrity to do a good job in this field, and that’s what we’re trying to provide to our clients,” Amsing said.

There’s more of an awareness that our critical energy assets are vulnerable, and we need to step up to the plate and realize our threats are not just domestic, but international now, according to Amsing “We have to find ways of stepping up our professionalism, our intelligence capabilities, and our protection of these critical areas. If we don’t do that, our economy, our people are going to be at great risk.”

With two home- grown terrorists from Calgary getting killed overseas fighting for ISIS, and two home-grown ISIS-related attacks last fall within Canada, Rydl said there is an increase in domestic terrorism linked to international terrorism. “It is a concern, absolutely,” he said. 🇨🇦



He used to wear a police uniform. Now Phil Rydl is in coveralls, providing security in the oilpatch. *Photo submitted*