

# Repeat-offender pilot program results in significant crime reduction, RCMP says; BC Civil Liberties Association warns to view internal statistics 'with a grain of salt'

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## ABSTRACT

The RCMP in Williams Lake reports sharp drops in a number of property crime rates three-and-a-half years after implementing a program that targets repeat offenders.

## FULL TEXT

The RCMP in Williams Lake reports sharp drops in a number of property crime rates three-and-a-half years after implementing a program that targets repeat offenders.

Drops of more than 90 per cent in vehicle thefts and as much as 44 per cent in home break-ins followed the start of the Prolific Offender Program, according to the RCMP.

The pilot program, which began in 2008, includes curfew checks for offenders put on a list following multiple convictions - mostly related to property crimes.

Police also use the list to check if repeat offenders have been following restrictions on drug or alcohol use.

Williams Lake RCMP also reported that business break-ins fell by 71 per cent, robberies by 20 per cent, and mischief by 34 per cent.

The drop in property crime rates are based on "calls for service," said Williams Lake RCMP Sgt. Rick Lebeuf. He said 2008 property crime averages were used as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of the program in Williams Lake.

Prince George RCMP have been using a similar program, said Prince George spokesman Cpl. Craig Douglass.

In Prince George, "little summits" take place monthly between police, BC Corrections, local government and other social agencies, he said.

During the meetings, participants compile lists of offenders and share information.

Offenders with over 50 convictions get put on the list, which carries 15 people at a time, he said, noting that most repeat offenders "are stealing to support some sort of habit."

Some people on the list may be visited by police four times a night, the officer said.

The program can also introduce offenders to social services such as addiction treatment or social housing, and can maintain proactive communication, potentially preventing further crimes, he said.

David Eby, of the BC Civil Liberties Association, said internal police stats need to be "taken with a grain of salt."

He also said the program's more "aggressive" tactics are putting increased pressure on impoverished first nations residents in the community.

"We have serious concerns with the results of this program, and are continuing to investigate the aggressive policing tactics," Eby said in an email.

Lebeuf said he makes "no apologies" for the intensified scrutiny by Williams Lake police.

"We have a high crime rate for a small town, and if somebody is committing a crime, they're going to catch our attention."

The Prolific Offender Program is a partnership between the RCMP and the ministries of Public Safety and Solicitor-General; the Attorney-General; and Children and Family Development, according to the project's 2008 overview. In addition to Williams Lake, the pilot program has been tested around B.C., including Kamloops, Victoria, Nanaimo, Prince George and Surrey.

Vancouver police also use a similar strategy, led by a designated unit of about eight officers who monitor about 400 "chronic offenders," many of whom have been convicted of more than 100 offences, said VPD spokeswoman Const. Jana McGuinness.

Using monitoring, self-check in and routine communication with chronic offenders, the unit is able to anticipate and halt "cycles of crime," the officer said.

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