

Handling explosives calls

Police seek disposal equipment

By LORI TAYLOR
Herald staff writer

The Halton Regional Police commission is moving towards acquiring bomb disposal equipment for use by the force's three bomb technicians in the face of an increasing number of incidents involving explosives in the area.

Police chief Ken Skerrett told the commission Wednesday that there have been 54 calls to police in 1978 regarding explosive devices, of which only three turned out to involve real bombs.

"The thing is, we have to treat them all as the real thing until we know otherwise," he said.

Constable Tom Roduck of Acton, one of the three bomb disposal technicians in the region, spoke to the commission about the equipment needed for bomb disposal, and made his own recommendations for the handling of calls involving explosive devices. Constable Roduck and Constables Tom Chapman and Matt MacPherson are all graduates of a training course in bomb disposal conducted at the Canadian Forces Base at Borden. The four-week course is the only such course in Canada.

PERSONAL INJURY
Constable Roduck said explosive devices have three purposes: to cause property damage or personal injury, or to perpetrate a hoax. In the case of a hoax, the device usually has all the ingredients of a real explosive, but it is not connected.

Bombs are used by extortionists, the mentally ill, people with a grudge against their employer, in domestic situations, in strikes where violence is involved, and by political terrorists, Constable Roduck said. There are no political terrorists of that kind in the area, "but we can see it coming".

The motivation for putting together a bomb is usually for personal satisfaction or gain, Constable Roduck said. The ingredients are readily available and not difficult to put together.

Explosive devices fall under six categories: hoax, explosives incendiary bombs, commercial explosives, hazardous explosives, and military explosives. The police are usually notified when an explosive device is planted, because the person involved usually "has an axe to grind", but he doesn't want anyone to get hurt, Constable Roduck said.

The RCMP has the Halton Regional force listed as having an explosives disposal unit, Constable Roduck said, although the force has no equipment for the technicians to use, and they must call for outside assistance if a bomb is discovered.

When a report is received that there is a suspicious package, a uniformed officer answers the call. If he has any doubts about the nature of the package, he can call in one of the technicians, Constable Roduck said.

ABSOLUTE MINIMUM
The handling of the explosive device should be kept to an absolute minimum, because it may be rigged to go off if it is touched or moved, he said. The officer answering the call has four priorities, ranging from the safety of others and himself to the reduction or prevention of property damage and the preservation of evidence.

Constable Roduck said the most essential piece of equipment needed by an explosives disposal unit is a disrupter, which will disrupt the bomb before it can explode. The disrupter is used by the RCMP, and by Peel Regional Police, and the Quebec Provincial Police have ordered a number of them.

"It used to be that someone would go in with a lot of wire, and carry things away," Constable Roduck said. "But we don't do that anymore. I wouldn't want to do it. No technician would."

Constable Roduck listed other necessary equipment such as safety glasses, rubber gloves, non-static coveralls, rope and diesel fuel. The total package of what he said was "the absolute minimum necessary equipment" would cost an estimated \$1,276, he said.

He recommended that the force obtain the necessary equipment as soon as possible, although he said he appreciated that the budget for this year had probably already been struck.

Constable Roduck emphasized that if a suspicious package is found which a police officer thinks may contain an explosive device, the officer should call the technician.

DON'T TOUCH
"No person other than the technicians should touch, handle or move the package," Constable Roduck said. "I can't stress this strongly enough. I want to stress this particularly to prevent an over-eager officer from handling the device to find out what it is."

"The old days of someone putting a couple of sticks of dynamite in a box and calling it a bomb are gone," he continued. "They're getting very sophisticated."

"Occurrences involving explosives and threats are on the increase," Constable Roduck said. "In 1978, there were eight devices found in Ontario and three of them were in Halton. By March, 1979, there were ten found in Ontario, two of them in Hamilton and one in Peel. And that doesn't include those mailboxes."

Constable Roduck said the force can continue to use the equipment and manpower of its neighbors to the east and west, but there will be a cost involved for that, "and it will be substantial," he said.

Judge Joseph Scime asked if the disrupter was fool-proof, and guaranteed to work, and whether or not it would be better to use the wire-cutting method.

Constable Roduck said the disrupter has not yet set off an explosion, but it could be used "a million times, and then detonate the bomb on the million-and-first".

"The only time you're going to get to any other technician to cut the wires on a bomb is if the bomb is next to a propane tank which is next to a hospital, where there is an operation in progress. Then we would have to cut the wires. But otherwise there's no way," he said. "We're trying to get away from that."

More and more police forces are finding it necessary to get the equipment needed for bomb disposal, Constable Roduck said. The armed forces have indicated that as of 1980, they will not be able to guarantee their assistance in bomb disposal unless the explosive device is military in origin.

The commission has decided to refer the list of equipment Constable Roduck drew up to Deputy Chief W.I. Harding for his comments before proceeding, although Commissioner Glenn Magnuson said he was prepared to say now that since the force has three trained technicians, they should be given the equipment to do the job.



COMMISSION MEETS LOCALLY

The Halton Regional Police Commission met in the Halton Hills Council chambers last Thursday, as part of the commission's decision to hold its meetings in different locations throughout the region. The members of the commission are, left to right, Milton Mayor Don Gordon, provincial appointee Alfred Oliver, His Honor Judge Joseph Scime, and Glenn Magnuson. Not visible in the photograph is commission chairman Harry Barrett.

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