

# NEW MOBILE APP HELPING POLICE FIND MISSING PEOPLE

Halton police are now making use of a special mobile app which they say is a game changer when it comes to finding lost people and resolving other types of emergencies.

## DON'T KEEP ME IN SUSPENSE. WHAT IS IT?

The company that offers the app is called What3words.

It is a geocode system that has divided the surface of the Earth into 57 trillion squares, that are three metres by three metres, and assigned a unique three-word label to each.

## YOU'VE LOST ME. HOW IS THAT GOING TO HELP HALTON POLICE OR ANYONE ELSE?

Halton police and other local emergency services regularly get calls from people who do not know exactly where they are.

People who have the What3words app on their mobile device can access it and provide the 911 operator with the three-word designation for the area they

are in.

Since Halton police are now utilizing What3words they can use that three-word designation to immediately determine the person's exact location.

Halton police Staff Sgt. Stephanie Jamieson said emergency services in the UK and Australia have been using this app since 2019.

Halton police had their first success with it in the fall of 2020.

## FIRST SUCCESS? WHAT HAPPENED?

Police said a woman was hiking in a remote area and found a firearm on the bank of a creek.

She called police, but was unable to provide them a location because she didn't know where she was.

The woman had the What3words app on her phone and was able to give the three-word code to police.

Officers identified the location, found the gun and seized it.

## I FEEL LIKE POLICE ALREADY HAVE

## SOMETHING LIKE THIS. CAN'T THEY ALREADY TRACK YOUR CELLPHONE OR SOMETHING?

Jamieson said police can 'ping' a cellphone, but that doesn't give them an exact location, just a general area that might have a radius of hundreds of metres.

The What3words app can give police a three metre by three metre location.

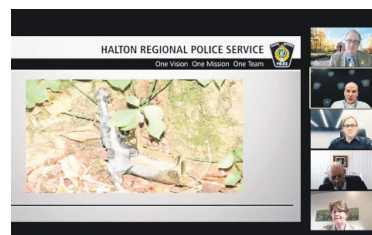
This proved important in February 2021 when a couple from Toronto and their six-year-old son got lost while hiking at Rattlesnake Point Conservation Area in Milton.

The mother called 911 at 6:15 p.m., at which point it had already gotten dark.

She also said the battery of her phone was about to die.

"You could hear her son crying in the background. It was something that we wanted to respond to very quickly," said Jamieson.

"We were able to talk the woman through downloading the app and we were able to have officers



Halton police photo Members of the Halton Police Board discuss the What3words app, which has helped police in a number of emergency situations.

at their location in under 25 minutes."

Given the size of the conservation area, Jamieson noted, the family could have been stuck in the cold for hours had the app not been utilized.

## OK. DOES IT HAVE ANY LIMITATIONS?

Halton Police Communications Supervisor Brian Dodd said the effectiveness of the app decreases somewhat when the person using it is indoors, but even

here it proved superior to pinging the cellphone.

Dodd provided an example from December 2020 in which a woman called Halton police and said her sister was being held against her will by two men.

The victim didn't know where she was but had been able to reach out to her sister by texting.

She was afraid her captors would hear her speaking if she actually called anyone, Dodd said.

Police tried to ping the victim's cellphone, but this resulted in a search area with a radius of 850 metres within an urban setting featuring apartment buildings and condos.

Police then sent the victim a text containing the What3words app.

The victim used this app and police were able to narrow the search area to a 32-metre radius.

Officers ultimately zeroed in on an apartment within a condo, made two arrests and rescued a victim of human trafficking.

## HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS?

You can visit <https://what3words.com>.

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