

Halton police add Crime Mapping feature to website

By David Lea
METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Halton residents who want to know more about the criminal activity happening in their neighbourhoods can now access that information through the Halton Regional Police Service website.

Halton police unveiled the new Crime Mapping feature to their website, which can be viewed at www.haltonpolice.ca/CrimeFiles/CrimeMapping/Pages/default.aspx, during a recent Halton police services board meeting. The feature displays a map of Halton and symbols indicating a specific type of crime that occurred (e.g. Assault is symbolized by a large A).

If the user clicks on the symbol, they will receive information about the date, time and location the incident took place.

"The public deserves to know what is happening in the communities they live in, they pay taxes in and that they work in," said Halton Police Chief Stephen Tanner.

"This is a really transparent way for us to share all the crimes that are happening in the Region of Halton with our citizens whether they live here or are travelling through the area."

Tanner said the 'Create an alert/update' heading of the site allows residents to receive e-mail alerts whenever a crime is reported to police in or near their neighbourhood.

The idea is that residents will become more aware of what is happening around them.

"We hope citizens will take that information and become a little more suspicious when they are notified of things happening and start to look for suspicious vehicles, suspicious people in their neighbourhoods and help us identify the perpetrators of those

crimes more quickly," said Tanner.

The criminal occurrences are updated automatically every 24-hours at midnight.

The type of crimes that can be listed on the site include breaking and entering, homicide, robbery, theft, theft of vehicle, theft from vehicle, sexual assault, assault, property crime, drug offences and traffic collisions in which injuries were caused.

Residents can also use the 'Date Range' option to see what crimes happened over the past three days, seven days, 14 days or 30 days. Numerous municipalities already have this kind of Crime Mapping feature available.

Tanner noted it was implemented in Kingston when he was chief of the Kingston Police Department.

"I saw the success of it and the positive feedback from the public in Kingston," said Tanner.

"For me it's a no brainer that we should be doing this."

Halton Police Superintendent Signy Pittman said another excellent feature to the site is that it is directly connected to Halton Crime Stoppers. That means residents can click on an incident they have knowledge of, click the tip option and send an anonymous online tip to Crime Stoppers.

As the site is largely automated the costs of keeping it in place are low. It will only cost the police service about \$2,000 per year, according to Pittman.

Residents can also check back as far as six months to see what crimes have taken place in a particular area of Halton.

Having what amounts to be an automated neighbourhood watch system should offer tremendous return on the investment made, said Halton Police Board Chair Robert Maich.

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