

POLICE: Crimes against persons increased by 2 per cent in 1998, statistics show

Region's overall crime rate dropped in '98

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
STAFF WRITER

York Region's crime rate continued to drop last year, falling by 3 per cent, while the region's population increased by about 3.7 per cent.

That means there were 683 fewer reported crimes at a time when about 24,000 more people moved into York Region.

In 1997, the region's crime rate dropped by 5 per cent, despite a population increase of 3.8 per cent.

The last crime rate increase came in 1995, when there was a 2-per-cent increase, in a year that saw a 3-per-cent population hike.

Police Services Board chairperson Margaret Black believes the drop in crime is due to an aging population.

"It's something that's happening across North America," she said.

While criminal occurrences dropped for the third year in a row, citizen demands for police service increased by 4.6 per cent, from 142,227 to 148,880.

A closer look at the statistics reveals that crimes against persons continued to rise last year.

While overall crime decreased by 3 per cent, crimes against persons rose by 2 per cent.

The category, which includes violent crimes, increased by 6 per cent in 1997.

The highest increase was in assaults with 2,923 incidents compared to 2,746 last in 1997, representing a 6 per cent increase.

Drug occurrences, an area Chief Julian Fantino hopes to continue targeting this year, jumped by 31 per cent last year.

Several high-profile marijuana arrests, including the region's largest ever in Markham, contributed to those figures. The drug occurrence increase skyrockets even further

— by 64 per cent — when the force includes all drug occurrences that were investigated without charges being laid.

For instance, charges aren't necessarily laid during the annual marijuana eradication program, which uses a helicopter to spot pot fields from the air.

Public morals occurrences also increased dramatically last year when investigations that didn't result in charges were included.

York Region police investigated 182 public morals incidents last year.

If only investigations that resulted in charges were

included, there would have been a 60 per cent decrease compared to 1997.

Crimes against property continued to drop last year, mirroring an 8 per cent decrease in 1997.

Even fraud-related crimes, which had increased by 6 per cent in 1997, fell by 6 per cent last year.

The criminal occurrence clearance rate for York Regional Police went up by 2 per cent, increasing to 34 per cent.

Traffic accidents decreased last year, with 6.5 per cent fewer collisions. Traffic fatalities were down by 15 per cent with 33 people killed last year, compared to 39 in 1997.

CRIME WATCH

Female clerk robbed

A lone female clerk was robbed at gunpoint Wednesday at the Daisy Mart on Fred Varley Drive. The man walked into the convenience store just after 1 p.m., revealed a handgun and demanded cash.

The clerk handed over about \$150 and the man fled on foot. He is described as white, about five-foot-ten, 150 pounds, with light eyes and no accent.

He was wearing a black balaclava and a black jacket.

Anyone with information is asked to call 881-1221 or CrimeStoppers at 222-TIPS.

Power tools swiped in Stouffville

Police have no suspects and no witnesses to a break enter and theft in Stouffville last Thursday.

Culprits entered a storage trailer at the Water's Edge Landscaping and Design company on Hwy. 48 sometime after 11 p.m. Jan. 21.

More than \$8,100 worth of power tools were stolen. No damage was reported.

— Kathleen Griffin

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