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Drug and weapon violations on the increase in York Region

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
 Staff Writer

Don Kirk is under no delusions police can stem York Region's growing number of crimes.

"Crime stats are always going to go up," the superintendent for York Regional Police's 5 District said. Kirk, whose area covers Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville, is one of several officials talking about rising crime rates in York Region.

A new report details what crimes took place in each of the region's five police districts from 1999 to 2000.

Drug violations in District 5 ballooned more than 53 per cent to nearly 270 and crimes against persons shot up by more than 20 per cent to nearly 1,330.

Kirk outlined several reasons for the increases including the area's rapid population growth and the fact officers focused on specific areas such as narcotics.

"As soon as we do a project in an area, we can actually double our drug stats," he said.

Kirk noted manpower has increased in his district but

declined to say specifically what police can do to keep crime from increasing, for fear of tipping off criminals.

He conceded citizens may see the numbers as a problem, but added police are working with the public to fight crime.

"Let's put it this way," he said. "I don't think police can do it alone."

I'd like to believe the programs we've been running...have had an impact.

That was also the message out of 4 District, which covers the Woodbridge and Maple areas.

Weapons violations there jumped nearly 46 per cent to 115 and drug violations rose more than 27 per cent to 355.

Supt. Bruce Herridge, who is new to the district, didn't know of any new programs police are creating to address those numbers but noted officials are working with ratepayers.

"I know that while sometimes the numbers look a little bit alarming, they reflect a couple of trends," Herridge said.

One of the trends, he added, is an increase in the number of people reporting crimes.

District 2, which covers Richmond Hill and Thornhill, had slight increases — and even decreases — in several areas.

Crimes against persons declined one per cent to less than 1,490 and drug violations slipped about one per cent to 400. But weapons violations rose more than 30 per cent to 116.

Insp. Gord Marshall would only say "there's work in progress" in addressing the weapons offences and could only offer educated guesses in explaining the numbers.

Some factors, he noted, are beyond the control of police. More criminals are using weapons, a problem across Greater Toronto, he said.

"I'd like to believe the programs we've been running...have had an impact," he said of the violent crime and drug stats. "I'd like to believe we have a law-abiding society."

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