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# Help us fight organized crime, police say

BY JEFF MITCHELL  
Staff Writer

Police in York Region are struggling to keep up with an ever-expanding wave of organized crime, the police services board heard yesterday.

"You can only be so efficient. And we're bound by resources," Insp. Randy Horne said.

"Our challenges are only going to get greater."

Insp. Horne, of the force's investigative services unit, outlined for board members a web of crime that extends to all corners of the planet and is increasingly infringing upon everyday life here.

He outlined how gangs with ties in Asia, Italy, Eastern Europe and North America have established a foothold and staked their claim in York Region.

Those criminal enterprises are evident in rising incidents of marijuana cultivation, prostitution, car theft and peripheral crimes — including murder — in burgeoning York, Insp. Horne said.

And criminals will continue to thrive here as long as it pays, he said.

"Any organized crime is profit driven."

His report prompted board member Bob Callow to call for support for more officers. The police budget sent to regional council earlier this month seeks 110 new cops and proposes to

increase spending by \$26 million, to \$140 million.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens, chairperson of the region's finance committee, has rejected the increase as too steep. The region has yet to make a final decision on the police budget.

Mr. Callow said plans for stepped-up hiring are designed to address issues such as increased activity by organized criminals.

"The reason we put this (hiring plan) forward is that we see these challenges ahead," Mr. Callow said.

"It's disturbing to see the material growth of these (criminal) organizations in our communities."

"Are we winning the war? Do we have enough resources to do that?"

Insp. Horne identified a number of groups responsible for the majority of the region's organized crime activity. They include:

- Asian gangs, whose primary activities are marijuana grow operations and body rub parlours that act as fronts for prostitution. They're also known for loan sharking, counterfeiting and extortion.

Although grow operations are undertaken by many criminal organizations, the market in York Region is dominated by the Asians, Insp. Horne said. Much of that dope winds up in the U.S.

- Eastern European gangs, many of whom are young men with military experience. They specialize in car theft, bank and credit card fraud and identity theft, Insp. Horne said.

"What we're finding in York Region is this group (is) very organized, very aggressive in the pursuit of money ... and not intimidated by law enforcement."

- Outlaw biker gangs, who deal in drugs, prostitutes, intimidation and other illegal activities, often in cahoots with traditional mob figures. Bikers such as the Hells Angels, which absorbed smaller Ontario gangs a few years back, are fiercely protective of their turf and have been known to engage in wars with rival gangs. The Angels have chapters in Keswick and Woodbridge.

A rival gang, the Bandidos, made its presence known in Canada by banding with Angels' archenemies, the Rock Machine a few years back.

"We've got six of them (Bandidos) in York Region. It has the potential for a problem," Insp. Horne said.

York Regional Police continue to work in conjunction with other police forces and intelligence agencies to monitor organized crime and potential terrorist activity, Insp. Horne said.

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