

PUBLIC SAFETY: Chief credits community connections

York's crime rate drops 4.5% – lowest in 3 years

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The number of crimes reported to York Regional Police last year plunged to the lowest level in five years.

Police recorded 34,776 crimes in 2011 — down 4.5 per cent from 2010.

The region's crime rate, which is the number of crimes per 100,000 people, dropped 6.6 per cent, to 3,203.43.

The numbers were presented during

Thursday's meeting of the region's police services board.

"I think it's our ability to connect and partner with our communities that helps," Chief Eric Jolliffe told the York Region Media Group of the consistently dropping crime rate.

The force has made a point of getting officers into both York school boards to positively interact with students, he said.

He hopes that effort is showing positive results, but admitted it's difficult to

measure.

Drops were seen in the number of sexual assaults, hate crimes, robberies and assaults reported, among other crimes, according to the York police annual statistical report.

Crimes committed by youths also fell.

While many categories dropped last year, there were more fatal vehicle collisions than in 2010.

Twenty-nine people died in 28 crashes — up from the 25 deaths in 24 crashes in 2010.

Also, the number of dangerous driving offences reported last year was up 13 per cent.

Despite that, the chief rejected the idea York's roads are becoming increasingly dangerous.

Motorists dialing 911 to report drivers they believe to be impaired may be contributing to the increase in the dangerous driving charges, he said.

During the meeting, board chairperson Frank Scarpitti asked the chief how he explains an increase of 10 per cent in the number of 911 calls with a falling crime rate.

Chief Jolliffe put it down to the force receiving so-called pocket dials, which involves a cellular phone user making an emergency call without intending to do so.

All of those calls have to be dealt with, the chief noted.

Meanwhile, the force acknowledges a growing population, which is being housed in higher density communities, presents workload challenges that will need to be dealt with, he added.

"We are doing our best to be efficient," he said.

Twenty-nine people died in 28 crashes — up from the 25 deaths in 24 crashes in 2010.

The York police cost-per-capita ratio is one of the best in the Greater Toronto Area, he added.

It's simplistic to suggest because crime is down, York police should trim its budget — which is up 6.5 per cent from 2011, Chief Jolliffe said.

Police forces are required to do more than just arrest criminals — such as prevent crime, he said.

"That is a little more costly than just responding to the crime when the crime comes in the door."

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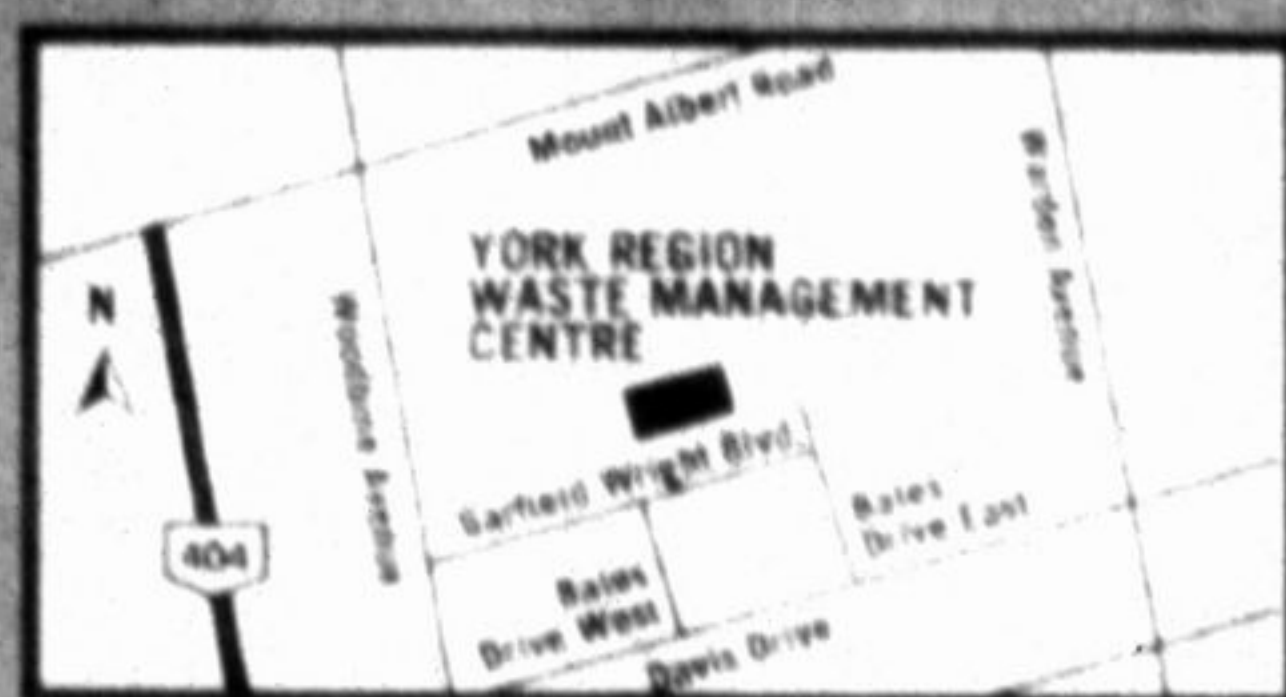
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