

8. Public Safety

High crime rates affect property values and influence perceptions of community safety. Although crime rates for Courtenay Municipal area still exceed the provincial average (while Comox Municipal and Comox Provincial are well below the provincial average), it is recognized that crime statistics provide a limited snap-shot and require more detailed analysis than can be provided in this report.



8.1 Police Call Volume

Police call volume reflects public involvement in identifying and reporting criminal activity and their confidence in the ability of the police to control that activity.

The Comox Valley Detachment is comprised of 62 active regular RCMP members, 21 support staff, jail guards, casual employees, reservists, and numerous volunteers. This is an increase since the 2004 report when there were 56 RCMP members and 16 support staff. Case load in the CVRD continues to remain higher than the provincial case load. Member workload was 107 Criminal Code offences, 8% higher than the previous year (99), and higher than the provincial case load of 72.¹⁸⁷

The Comox Valley 2007 call volume was slightly lower than previous years at approximately 22,000 files. Some files are generated that don't require police investigation, and those requiring police investigation become investigative files or cases.

The call volume for the Comox Valley continues to be one of the highest in the province. One of the reasons the Valley is so busy is because it is a desirable place to live, and attracts many visitors throughout the year. The two islands within the policing jurisdiction, Hornby and Denman, are popular seasonal destinations: this contributes to increased policing needs.

In 2007, there were 5,977 recorded Criminal Code offences in the Comox Valley Regional District. This was a 10% increase over the 2006 number of 5,453.¹⁸⁸

In Table 15 below, the crime rate is defined as the number of Criminal Code offences (excluding traffic offences) per 1,000 of the population. BC's overall crime rate has been

¹⁸⁷ Comox Valley Regional District, *Regional Profile 2007*.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

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declining since 2004. Although there has been a similar decline in the Comox Valley rates, 2007 saw an increase in parts of the policing districts.

Table : Crime Rate Comparison

Location	2002	2004	2006	2007
Comox Municipal	85	65	44	63
Comox Valley Provincial	71	80	53	53
Courtenay Municipal	233	208	152	155
British Columbia	117	125	114	104

Source: BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, BC Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends 1998-2007.

8.2 Crime Prevention Programs

Many communities have crime prevention programs through which citizens may help reduce crime and the fear of crime in a proactive and positive way.

Education of school aged children is one strategy for preventing crime. Auxiliary and regular RCMP members visit schools to familiarize students with safety, drug and alcohol abuse resistance awareness, and other community policing programs. The school visits occur from kindergarten to grade 12: with age appropriate themes.

The Comox Valley Detachment was named as a pilot site for Crime Reduction Strategy in 2005. All programs were reviewed with a goal of providing the best police coverage for the service communities at peak times. A community response unit was created to operate during these peak times. A call manager position received all incoming non-urgent calls, thereby reducing the burden on the policing members. Crime prevention strategies included targeting prolific offenders who commit a large percentage of the crime. The Comox Valley Detachment reduced their crime rate in the majority of categories by 30% in 2007 as a result of the initiative.

Block Watch, formerly called Neighbourhood Watch, is a community-based program that encourages neighbours to alert each other to potential crime and to look out for one another. According to the latest *Block Watch News*, 2008 crime statistics show that property crime rates dropped by 33% since 2004. The RCMP reported a 26% per cent drop in business break and enters in the Comox Valley in 2008.¹⁸⁹

Citizens on Patrol Society (COPS) is a group of community volunteers who assist the police by patrolling the streets. They carry database instruments (Stolen Auto Recovery

¹⁸⁹ *Block Watch News*, April 2009.

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System) to help recover stolen vehicles. In 2008, 66 volunteer members worked 15,109 hours and drove 61,670 kilometres.¹⁹⁰

Comox Valley Crime Stoppers is a program that encourages people to submit an anonymous tip about a specific crime or about other criminal activities. Cash rewards of up to \$2,000 are available for tips that lead to an arrest or conviction.

RCMP Victim Services helps individuals of all ages who have been victims of assault, abuse or other violent crimes. There are two office staff and 8 volunteers who provide support and referrals to other agencies where needed. The number of young clients served annually is about 12.¹⁹¹

Specialized Victim Assistance Program provides similar support and services but focuses on victims and witnesses of sexual abuse. It has a staff of two, one volunteer, and helps about 40 clients each year.¹⁹²



8.3 Violent Crime

Police continue to implement new strategies such as the Crime Reduction Strategy which focuses on prolific and priority offenders, crime hotspots, and the causes of crime utilizing intelligence based policing. Criminal Code offences are divided into three major categories: crimes against persons (violent crimes), crimes against property, and other crimes.

Violent crime includes homicide, attempted murder, sexual offences, assault, robbery, and abduction. Violent crime causes long-term damage to the physical and emotional health of the victims, their families, and society in general.

Violent crime accounted for 11% of all Criminal Code offences in BC in 2006, up slightly from the 2002 level of 10%. In the Comox Valley, the number of sexual and non-sexual assaults has been steadily decreasing, although there were more reported sexual assaults in 2007 than the low of 2006.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Citizens On Patrol Comox Valley. Community Resource Database, Record Details.

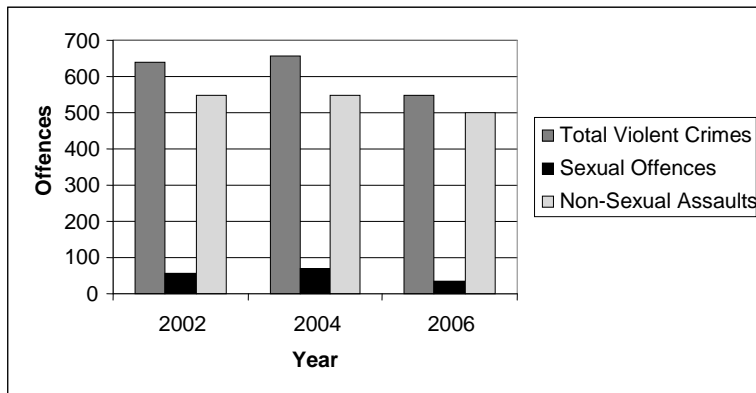
¹⁹¹ Department of Justice, Policy Centre for Victim Issues, Comox Valley RCMP Victim Service Program.

¹⁹² Department of Justice, Policy Centre for Victim Issues, Specialized Victim Assistance Program, Comox Valley Family Services.

¹⁹³ BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, *BC Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends 1997-2007*.

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Figure : Violent Crimes – Sexual/Non-sexual Offences - Comox Valley



Source: BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, BC Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends 1997-2006.

Although violent crime in BC has increased slightly (4%) since 2004, there has been a decline in the Comox Valley since 2004 of over 15%. For the Comox Valley a considerable decrease was noted in sexual assault offences: from 70 in 2004 to 33 in 2006. The number of sexual assaults in BC in 2006 was the lowest recorded number in over 20 years.

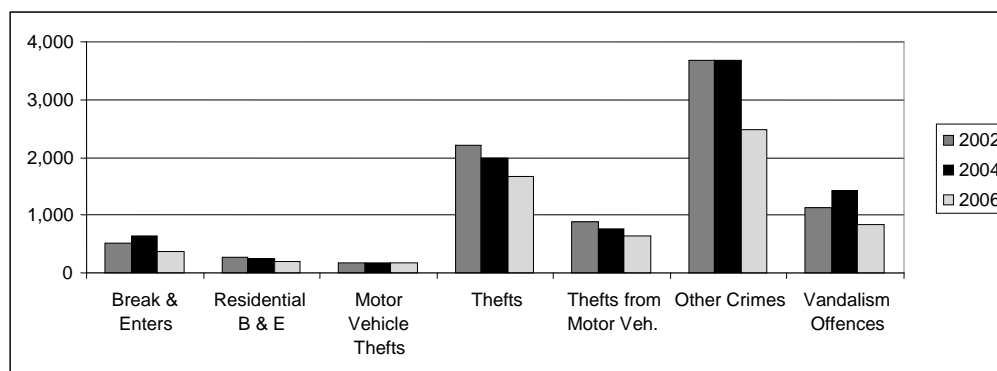


8.4 Property Crime

Property crime includes motor vehicle theft, break and enter, fraud, and possession of stolen property.

Property crime in BC has been decreasing for the last decade; in the Comox Valley it has been decreasing since 2002. The clearance rate (the actual rate where identification of a suspect is made) for property crime province-wide is about 15%.

Figure : Property Crimes - Comox Valley 2002 - 2006



Source: BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, BC Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends 1997-2006.

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The Comox Valley has shown a slight increase in the theft of motor vehicles up by approximately 10%, while the rest of BC has shown a decrease by 16%. Bait car programs in the province are credited with declining thefts of vehicles, and the Comox Valley is now participating in this program. The newly implemented Crime Reduction Strategy that targets prolific offenders is expected to impact future results in a positive manner.



8.5 Youth Crime (12 to 17 years)

Serious crime by youth ages 12 to 17 is decreasing in the Comox Valley. The chart below is based on the former Comox Strathcona Regional District profile from BC Stats. The district rates remain below the BC rates.

Table : Serious Youth (Age 12-17) Crime Rate – Avg 2004/06, Comox Valley Regional District

(Offences per 1,000 population.)

	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Total
CSRD	1.5	1.9	3.4
BC	2.5	2.0	4.5

Source: BC Statistics, CSRD 25 Regional Profile, 2008.

Overall, BC continues to have the lowest rate of youth incarceration in Canada and very few Comox Valley youth are in custody on any given day. Community probation caseloads remain stable and manageable, although the profile of such youth is complex and multi-problem (e.g. significant substance abuse and mental health challenges).

There are a number of community services for youth who are in conflict with the law. Programs are delivered by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and contracted agencies like the John Howard Society of North Island. The Comox Valley Community Justice Centre also helps people to find mutually agreeable resolutions to harm caused by youth crime. This is a voluntary process.¹⁹⁴

8.6 Restorative Justice

Comox Valley Community Justice Centre Society, located at 450 8th St., Suite E, has been in operation since 1998. The program reports a volunteer group of almost 100 serving the Comox Valley. The centre facilitates restorative conferences involving offenders (youth and adult) and those harmed by offending behaviour, along with community volunteers.

¹⁹⁴ Youth Justice Programs, Vancouver Island, The John Howard Society of North Island.

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The Community Justice Centre reported a drop in their case load referrals by almost 35% in 2008 from their historical average. They attribute this in part to “an increased policing focus on high incidence offenders who are not eligible for referral to the Centre; police officers exercising other discretionary options in their encounters with young offenders; general downward trends in the crime statistics; a preference for prosecution of some public mischief incidents (e.g. graffiti)”.¹⁹⁵ However, in the period of February to May 2009, they had 75 cases referred and held an unprecedented number of resolution conferences.¹⁹⁶

Following a workshop for Loss Prevention Officers (LPO's) at the large chain stores, the Centre responded to renewed interest in the restorative option by permitting direct referrals of cases, with the co-operation of the RCMP. Another change that has apparently had great effect is a change to our reporting of the final disposition of cases. At the suggestion of one of our Court Liaison Officers, we now include a letter to the referring RCMP officer to advise them of the positive outcome. We have had numerous officers reporting that they appreciate knowing how things turn out as a result of exercising their discretion to refer the case to us.¹⁹⁷

Table : Community Justice Centre Annual Statistical Report by Results

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Results						
Number of files returned (incomplete Resolution Conferences, no	10	11.8	12	14.6	11	15.7
Number of unsuccessful resolutions conferences	5	5.8	1	1.2	1	1.4
Number of files partially successful	6	7.0	3	3.7	11	15.7
Number of files successfully completed	35	41.2	64	78.0	43	61.4
Number of cases carrying forward to following year	29	34.1	2	2.4	4	5.7
Total	85		82		70	

Source: Comox Valley Community Justice Centre Society, Tenth Annual Report, November 27, 2008, p.9.

Other agencies and businesses are referring cases to the Centre as word gets out about their service. Municipal and regional district bylaw officers and insurance companies

¹⁹⁵ Comox Valley Community Justice Centre Society, Tenth Annual Report, November 27, 2008, p.5.

¹⁹⁶ Volunteer Newsletter of the Community Justice Centre, Vol.3, No.3, May 2009, p.3.

¹⁹⁷ Comox Valley Community Justice Centre Society, Tenth Annual Report, November 27, 2008, p.5.

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have had success with the process. Large retail businesses are now using the Centre for some shoplifting cases.

The Community Justice Centre has also completed a 3 year project to address racism, homophobia and hate crime, culminating in the adoption of a community response protocol signed by over 35 local governments and community organizations in May, 2009. The Centre also trained volunteers as short-term transformative dialogue facilitators to be available in response to critical incidents, and will compile an annual Incident Report for the community.¹⁹⁸



8.7 Sexual Assaults

Because of a change in reporting systems in BC, information pertaining to the Comox Valley from previous years is not comparable to the current year. The numbers reported in Table 24 below are for information only.

Table : Number of Sexual Offences in the Comox Valley, 2004 – 2007

Policing Jurisdiction	2004	2005	2006	2007
Comox Municipal	18	3	2	4
Comox Valley Provincial	25	13	17	3
Courtenay Municipal	27	31	14	23
Total	70	47	33	30

Source: British Columbia Policing Jurisdiction Crime Trends 1998 – 2007.



8.8 Spousal Assaults

In the Comox Valley, Spousal Assault is recorded under three categories: Domestic Dispute-Male offender, Domestic Dispute-female offender, and Domestic Dispute-no assault.

A change of systems in British Columbia means that data from previous years is not comparable to the current figures. However compared to the BC average, the average for spousal assault in the Comox Valley is higher, as well as higher than a major city such as Vancouver.

¹⁹⁸ Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Victim Services and Crime Prevention: Restorative Justice Funding, April 1, 2009.

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Table : Spousal Assault Crime Rates

District	Per 100,000
Comox Valley	2.5
Campbell River	3.3
Vancouver	1.7
BC	2.3

Source: BC Stats, Other Indicators of Crime, Crime Rate – Average 2003-2005.

Related Indicators: Crisis Support Services



8.9 Drug Trends

There were 478 drug crimes reported in the Comox Valley Regional District in 2007, a 13% decrease from the 552 reported in 2006. The drug crime rate (per 1,000 population) in 2006 was 8.8. That dropped by 15% in 2007 to 7.5 offences per 1,000, but was higher than the provincial rate of 6.5 offences per 1,000.¹⁹⁹

Youth (12-17) non-cannabis drug charges (Charges per 100,000, Avg. 2004/06) were 34.1. BC's non-cannabis drug charges have changed little: 46.8 in 2001/03 to 47.0 in 2004/06.²⁰⁰

Table : Indicators of Serious Drug Crime - Average 2003-2005

	Comox Valley	BC
Non-Cannabis Drug Offences (per 100,000 pop.)	169.4	201.5
Juvenile Non-Cannabis Charges (per 100,000 pop age 12-17)	32.6	46.8
Illicit Drug Deaths - 2005 (per 100,000 pop age 19-64)	0	3.8

Source: Statistics Canada, E-Stat Crime Statistics by Detailed Offences and BC Stats, Regional District 25 - Comox-Strathcona Statistical Profile, Indicators of Crime: Serious Drug Crime.

¹⁹⁹ Police Services Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, British Columbia, September 12, 2008. Regional Profile 2007, Comox Valley Regional District, p.2.

²⁰⁰ BC Statistics, CSRD 25 Regional Profile, 2008 (http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/sep/rd/rd_main.asp), and Director's Practice Audit Report – Vancouver Island, June 2007, Courtenay Youth Services Team- KKB, p.5.