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Serving the police community since 1939
Vol. 81, No. 1, 2019
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COVER SECTION

DEPARTMENTS

ON THE COVER:
No matter what RCMP officers like Cst. Kelly Pelchat encounter during their shift, taking precautions to ensure their health and safety is an important part of their work.

Photo: *Serge Gouin, RCMP*

EDITORIAL MESSAGE

STRIVING FOR SAFER, HEALTHIER EMPLOYEES

When we first started planning our issue on health and safety, we thought each story would easily fall under one category or the other. But what soon became clear was that the lines between health and safety are blurred. In fact, they're often one and the same.

For our cover, Patricia Vasylchuk spoke to employees in New Brunswick, the first province to pilot the RCMP's Road to Mental Readiness course in 2013.

Although first viewed with skepticism, the course is now being used by officers and employees as a way to share difficult experiences and negative feelings with someone else. "It's not the dungeon that no one talks about anymore," as one officer explains about her grief.

For officers who've been through a critical incident like a shooting, returning to operational duty can take time. Paul Northcott writes about a program in Alberta that helps police officers safely reintegrate back to work and regain their confidence at their own pace.

Police work doesn't need to be traumatic to be stressful. During last summer's wildfires in British Columbia, hundreds of RCMP members were again deployed to the fire zone to evacuate communities. You'll read how, this time around, two teams of peer-to-peer officers drove across the province to help the helpers, either by taking care of their families left behind or finding officers mental-health support.

We also look at the connection between physical fitness and mental health. Employees in New Brunswick use group workouts as a weapon against fatigue and illness, and to boost their confidence and social interactions — all recipes for health and safety at home and in the field.

Have you ever wondered what the most common officer and employee workplace injuries are? Read about the steps for preventing those under your control.

Getting behind the wheel is one of the most dangerous things an officer will do on shift. For our panel discussion, read what four RCMP experts say are the biggest dangers officers face in and around their cars, and how to reduce the risk of injury.

Taking precautions such as these is part of police work. Our story on the safe handling of fentanyl shows that RCMP officers are doing the right things when faced with this hazardous substance: wearing gloves and washing their hands. Learn more about opioid exposure and the RCMP use of naloxone in its first year.

We close the issue with a story that speaks to finding hope after tragedy. A summer camp for the children and spouses of officers who died in the line of duty, suddenly or by suicide, gives them a way to stay connected with others who understand their loss.

There's no separating health and safety, and there's no need to. If we take care of one, we'll improve the other. ■

— Katherine Aldred

GAZETTE

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COMMUNITY PROGRAM INCREASES RESIDENTIAL SAFETY

By Travis Poland

RCMP

Cpl. Laurel Kading conducts a security evaluation as part of the Crime Free Multi-Housing program.

Residents in some apartment buildings will feel more secure now that Comox Valley RCMP has created a Crime Free Multi-Housing Program in their community.

"It makes the tenants feel safer and it makes the landlord feel safer," says Cst. Donna Collins, a community police officer at the RCMP Comox Valley detachment in British Columbia.

The program aims to combat criminal activity in apartment buildings and townhouses through education and property design.

Building owners receive three rounds of training, have security evaluations at their property and encourage tenants to prevent crime. Buildings that meet the program's standards earn "crime-free building" status and signs to post around the property.

Collins says the program ensures properties have proper outdoor lighting and secure locks on all doors and windows.

Local governments in the Comox Valley have voiced support for Crime Free Multi-Housing.

"Councils endorse it to keep their community safe," says Collins, who previously worked with Crime Free Multi-Housing in Chilliwack, B.C. "There's been some questions, but I haven't had any negative feedback."

The program has been effective in building community relationships, says Cpl. Laurel Kading, a community police officer in St. Albert, Alta., where Crime Free Multi-Housing has operated for four years and now covers nine properties.

"People feel comfortable reaching out to us if they need some advice, want to problem solve some issues or find out some crime-prevention information," Kading says.

Crime Free Multi-Housing also plays a role in crime prevention, reminding potential law-breakers that residents and police are vigilant.

"People tend to be aware that these are not properties where criminal activities are tolerated," Kading says.

Collins says she looks forward to expanding the program in Comox Valley.

"Once a couple of buildings get started, neighbouring buildings start to get interested as well."

The New Westminster Police Department in British Columbia launched Canada's first Crime Free Multi-Housing program in 1994. It has since been adopted by dozens of communities. ■

PROGRAM KEEPS TROUBLED KIDS OUT OF JUSTICE SYSTEM

By Paul Northcott

A new partnership between police and youth probation officers in Surrey, B.C., aims to keep troubled kids on the right track.

Car Yankee 30, also known as Y30, features an RCMP youth officer and a provincial youth probation worker who work together to reduce the number of young people involved in the criminal justice system and help them observe their curfews.

The team works with youth aged 12 to 18 years who are on probation so that they comply with their court-ordered conditions. Those orders often stem from assault, drug possession and robbery crimes.

"They're put on curfew for that stuff because they're seen as a risk to the community," says RCMP Cst. Glynton Brittain of Y30. "But we can offer them some information and a chance to make their lives easier down the road."

Failure to obey their court orders only prolongs their time in the judicial system. So since June, the Y30 team has been driving to areas frequented by troubled and homeless youth to reach out.

"Even if we see some kids hanging out on the side of the road, we might just pull over and say hi. But we're focused on prevention, deterrents, enforcement and education," says Brittain.

Another element of the youth team's mandate involves making sure young people and their parents, or other caregivers, are aware of the supports that exist in the community for navigating the youth court system.

Cpl. Ivan Lee, who is a member of the Surrey Youth Unit, says the Y30 team meets with community groups, schools and other youth organizations each week.

"Part of that is to continue developing relationships with all our programs, so if some issues did come up involving youth, those meetings might have created a better level of trust," says Lee.

The get-togethers also keep police informed of any new or cancelled programs. It's information that helps keep everyone more aware.

"Young people can get stigmatized pretty quickly when they're in the court system," says Lee. We want to give them the tools and information so they don't stay there." ■

EVERY SECOND COUNTS IN AVALANCHE RESCUE

By Paul Northcott

When a person is buried violently underneath metres of snow, avalanche rescue dogs and their handlers must respond rapidly — often in challenging backcountry conditions.

"If we want to find someone alive, time is critical," says Cpl. Dale Ristau, a member of the RCMP's Lower Mainland Integrated Police Dog Service.

He says many avalanche victims will survive if they're found within 15 minutes, but that number drops dramatically as time goes by.

Despite best efforts to rescue victims, there are an average of 14 avalanche-related deaths in Canada each year. In those cases, the efficiency of the dog teams' work is also vital for the safety of rescuers during recovery efforts.

In 2017, an avalanche on Mount Harvey, between Vancouver and Squamish, B.C., killed five people. Ristau says avalanche dogs and ground search-and-rescue teams were used to locate the victims. He says it would have taken human workers hours more to cover such treacherous terrain and the large debris field on foot.

"The dogs can work quickly and that can reduce the risk for a lot of the (human) rescuers," he says.

In B.C.'s Lower Mainland, the RCMP dog service has three trained Avalanche Search and Rescue teams.

Handlers must demonstrate they can work in the snow and recognize high-risk areas for avalanches. The dogs have to prove they can find people surrounded by snow.

In the Lower Mainland — with a population of more than two million and hundreds of nearby winter recreational opportunities — that means being ready to respond on a moment's notice.

"Given our close proximity to the North Shore Mountains, Whistler Blackcomb, there's a huge recreational population where people are using the mountains for a variety of reasons," says S/Sgt. Joel Leblanc, who's in charge of the Lower Mainland District Integrated Police Dog Services. "Sometimes people get up there, with not a lot of experience, and it's unsafe."

RCMP

When avalanche dogs are deployed, time is critical for their rescue efforts to succeed.

Ristau, a self-described outdoor enthusiast, says he's always been intrigued by the team.

"I look at the service as an extra tool to help the public, and you have a bond with the animal that's so unique. There's nothing like it in the RCMP." ■

GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT AIMS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

By Travis Poland

It's a small square with a big meaning.

Last fall RCMP members throughout Canada donned a small patch of moose hide on their breast pocket to raise awareness for violence against women and children as part of the Moose Hide Campaign.

"Wearing the square has started conversations," says RCMP Cpl. Rick Sinclair, who works with Winnipeg's Aboriginal Police Services. "People have been asking what else they can do to prevent violence in our community."

RCMP members join more than 1.2 million others wearing the pin, signifying a commitment to protecting women and children.

"We started this out as a way to raise awareness for violence toward Indigenous women but we quickly learned it's an issue shared by women all over the country," says Paul Lacerte, who created the campaign with his daughter Raven seven years ago.

The pair thought of the campaign on a moose hunt near British Columbia's 'Highway of Tears' where dozens of women and girls have died or disappeared.

RCMP

RCMP members wear a small patch of moose hide on their breast pocket to raise awareness about violence against women and children, as part of the Moose Hide Campaign.

"I'm really excited the RCMP has permission and encouragement to wear the pin on their uniform," says Lacerte, adding that in some places, the local RCMP detachment is among the first to take on the campaign.

The RCMP's commitment to the Moose Hide Campaign goes beyond wearing the pin. A variety of events and workshops about gender-based violence were organized alongside the campaign.

Sinclair says RCMP events in Manitoba included a community bike ride in Gypsumville, a walk in partnership with a local friendship centre in Swan River, and a youth hockey game in Gillam.

"It's another way we can demonstrate we're willing, able and prepared to work with all communities to prevent violence," says Sinclair.

Sinclair says the Moose Hide Campaign has inspired some to get more involved in preventing violence.

"People want to contribute, give their time, and work with the RCMP," he says. ■

THE ROAD TO HEALING

TALKING IT OUT KEY AFTER NEW BRUNSWICK SHOOTINGS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

When the RCMP's Road to Mental Health Readiness course, or R2MR, was piloted at Codiac detachment in New Brunswick in 2013, many people didn't take it seriously. But the 2014 shooting deaths of three RCMP officers in Moncton caused a major shift in the conversation around mental health.

"It affected everybody. We couldn't not talk about it," says Sheri Dryden, a fitness and health advisor for RCMP in New Brunswick. She says more employees are talking about their emotions using a colour-coded chart from the RCMP's mental health awareness course, which indicates feelings, behaviours and attitudes that range from healthy to troublesome, in gradients of green, yellow, orange and red.

"I don't need to say I'm depressed, I'm anxious, I'm not sleeping. I can just say 'I'm orange,'" says Dryden. "It gives people an acceptable language to discuss mental health comfortably."

Serge Gouin, RCMP

For Cpl Lynn Saulnier, talking was the key to healing from declining mental health.

START TALKING ABOUT IT

Like many officers, Sgt. JP MacDougall goes through periods when he feels overwhelmed from the job. Last August, he was one of the first RCMP officers on scene where four people, including two Fredericton police officers, were shot dead from an apartment window.

"We're starting to realize now that it's OK to be mentally tired and drained. We need to start talking about it, and normalize the conversation," says MacDougall, an RCMP detachment commander in Woodstock. "What's not OK is to not talk about it, not deal with it, bury it and wait for it to fester."

He compares difficult experiences to drops of water in a cup that can overflow into a mental-health crisis.

"When the negative feelings are dealt with, you take water out of that cup," he says. "Out of all those events, the ones that I spoke about don't haunt me."

Retired Cst. Peggy Delisle worked many disastrous vehicle accidents and witnessed gruesome deaths during her 15-year career in the RCMP.

"We don't have time to process what we just witnessed before going on to the next one," says Delisle. "You put them in this little compartment in your mind and forget about them until a tragic event makes the doors flood open."

When a third member she knew died in the line of duty in the Moncton shooting, Delisle found herself having flashbacks, nightmares and panic attacks. She became angry, irritable and mistrustful: "All of a sudden there was no colour in the world."

She says talking with a therapist from the Operational Stress Injury Clinic in Fredericton, N.B., an independent mental-health treatment centre specializing in working with police, helped overcome the darkness.

"Never underestimate the power of a good boo-hoo," laughs Delisle. "So many people associate this with weakness, but that's not true. It takes a strong person to take this step."

SELF-ASSESSMENT

For Cpl. Lynn Saulnier, a single work call triggered emotions from months of personal issues. That night in June, Saulnier held her gun drawn searching for the Moncton shooter.

A supervisor on the Further Investigation Unit at the RCMP Codiac detachment, Saulnier still had her gun out eight hours later, when she heard about the deaths of two of her officers over the police radio.

"Because I had a job to do, I just put it out of my mind to deal with later," she says. After the shock wore off, Saulnier says she felt angry and empty.

"I wasn't progressing, like I was looping," she says. "I started not being able to do the day-to-day things."

When she realized the changes she saw in herself were on the risky end of the mental-health colour spectrum, she knew she needed help.

"It's not the dungeon that no one talks about anymore," she says about discussing her grief with a counsellor and a close group of girlfriends.

Saulnier says she thinks her own traumatic experience now makes her a more credible instructor for the R2MR course. She now helps others know their colour — and when to get help.

"People can say 'she's been there and done that, she's not just blowing smoke.'" ■

HELPING THE HELPERS

SUPPORT FOR OFFICERS IN WILDFIRE ZONES

By Paul Northcott

RCMP

Hundreds of RCMP officers operated checkpoints and helped with evacuations during the wildfires in British Columbia last summer.

As fires ravaged the forests of British Columbia last summer, RCMP officers worked long shifts to protect threatened communities — and a team of colleagues, in turn, worked to look after them.

"Taking good care of our members not only helped with their immediate well-being, it also contributed to better morale," says James Browne, the Acting Regional Chief Occupational Safety Officer in British Columbia. "And keeping morale high maintains officers' ability to make better risk assessments when they're on the ground so they can make good decisions and ultimately protect people and property."

In the summer of 2018, wildfires in the northern and southeastern parts of British Columbia prompted multiple evacuation orders and alerts for residents in nearby communities. Those declarations affected tens of thousands of people and in August the province declared a state of emergency.

As the forests burned, hundreds of RCMP officers were sent on seven-day deployments in the fire zones to operate checkpoints, help with evacuations, protect property and relieve officers at local detachments. Many officers served two or three tours.

During that time, the health and wellness of those officers was monitored by two roving teams of two peer-to-peer officers. Those teams were tasked with driving thousands of kilometres around the province to visit their co-workers on the front line of the fires.

"They were there to listen and to respond to the needs of the officers as best as possible," says Sgt. Gus Papagiannis, in charge of support services in British Columbia. "They were there to go and see the members and ask: 'How was your shift, how did you sleep, how is your family, do you need anything?'"

PRESSURES OF THE JOB

The strain of working in a dangerous environment away from the comforts of home can create a lot of stress. But for some RCMP officers, that pressure was multiplied because their own families and homes were being evacuated. To help, accommodations for families were made available at the Pacific Region Training Centre (PRTC) in Chilliwack, B.C.

Papagiannis says those efforts, along with the support of the peer-to-peer teams, showed officers they weren't being forgotten.

"Knowing their families were OK and having two people out in the theatre made a world of difference," says Papagiannis. "It was important for the officers in the field to know that we listened and that we tried to close the loop for them as we worked to address their concerns."

He added the peer-to-peer teams weren't in the field to act as counsellors, but if mental health supports were requested, they would be made available.

"It's been my experience that when we treat people well, give them the resources they need to do their job and listen to and address their concerns, they'll move mountains for you," he says.

POST-FIRE FEEDBACK

When the fire-zone officers returned to the regional training centre in Chilliwack after their deployment, they got another chance to talk — or debrief — about their experience. At the training centre, they were met by a commissioned officer to collect feedback. Their comments included a mix of complaints and praise over accommodation, morale, long travel days, rest and the availability of the peer-to-peer team.

There was also some grumbling about food availability, which ranged from low supplies, lack of restaurants near lodgings and some eateries shutting down too early.

"Food was a big issue, and some recommended mobile kitchens be deployed," says Papagiannis, who says that information was subsequently sent to the command group who worked hard to address those concerns.

C/Supt. Stephan Drolet, who was responsible for overseeing RCMP deployments during the wildfires, called the feedback crucial.

"It gave us a great opportunity to improve our operations and better support our members," he says.

It's important data because deployments to fire zones are likely to continue.

"The forests are tinder dry and we need to ensure the well-being of those officers is taken care of and ongoing since it's possible we could see another round of fires in 2019," says Browne.

"We have to be prepared." ■

RETURN TO WORK

PROGRAM SUPPORTS OFFICERS AFTER CRITICAL INCIDENTS

By Paul Northcott

Helping RCMP officers get back to work after a critical incident involves a network of people who provide professional help, patience and time to support their colleagues' return.

In Alberta, the Re-integration Program was established in 2015 as a peer-driven initiative to ensure officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents — such as serious motor-vehicle accidents or in-custody deaths — can perform their operational duties when they come back to work.

"Historically, we did not have a formalized process to ensure members were comfortable using their intervention options prior to coming back," says Sgt. Ray Savage, whose work developing the program has inspired others to advocate for a national program. "Since its inception the Re-integration Program has emerged a standard of care for members."

DEALING WITH TRAUMA

After a critical incident, officers are referred to an RCMP Health Services psychologist who will debrief the individual, discuss the incident and decide if their participation in the Re-integration Program is required.

An officer referred to the program will speak to a pair of re-integration facilitators who are selected based on their operational experience and interpersonal skills. The facilitators meet with the officer, talk about the incident, and discuss how the officer feels and what procedures will facilitate their return.

But it's the officer receiving the help who actually steers the process.

"Critical-incident events can cause a significant emotional impact for officers that can overwhelm their traditional coping mechanisms," says Savage. "We give them the time to come up with a plan to allow them to drive what they want to do so they can return."

For example, an officer involved in a shooting may have trouble dealing with the smell of gun powder or the sound of a shot. They may also need to regain their confidence to work with live fire.

"So if they want, we can take them down to the shooting range. We can recreate the incident in a controlled environment to make sure the member can become comfortable using their operational skills again," says Savage.

That's why Insp. Betty Gilholme, an administration and personnel officer in Nunavut, has been sending officers who need help, south.

"We have small detachments, a higher-than-normal ratio of critical incidents and we don't have an environment here that can provide that kind of support," she says.

Gilholme says officers participating in the program get help dealing with the aftermath of critical incidents and any trauma that could emerge down the road.

"It allows a safe place to go through an exercise that helps the officer understand things they may not have been aware of," she says. "We don't want members to freeze when they are back on the job because they haven't processed the previous trauma."

REGAINING CONFIDENCE

Cpl. Steve Oster, with the RCMP's National Use of Force Unit, is leading the initiative to take the Re-integration Program national. He's also a big fan of the work done in Alberta.

"I'm confident they have prevented members from leaving the force, even saved lives," he says.

One officer who participated in the program after shooting a suspect, reported that re-integration should be mandatory for any officer who has gone through a critical incident.

"The days following the shooting are filled with stress, disbelief and uncertainty. Nobody can be expected to function normally and get over a traumatic experience without help and support," the officer wrote in a statement. "The re-integration program helped me regain my confidence and the belief in myself, which allowed me to get back on my feet."

Oster, who has also endured critical incidents, agrees.

"Sometimes we fake it in the field. We can't be emotional because we're the ones who are supposed to be helping people, not the other way around," Oster says. "But those feelings kept inside will catch up with you."

Savage says 77 officers have been through the program, which has since expanded to include those returning to work from physical or psychological injury.

Once they return after getting the OK from the psychologist, the officers often become instant advocates of reintegration.

"Those members pay it forward and they become a point of contact for the program and encourage other members," says Savage. ■

RCMP

Facilitators with the Re-integration Program in Alberta work with officers to ensure they're ready to perform their operational duties after a critical incident.

Serge Gouin, RCMP

Working in and around police cars is a dangerous part of police work. Officers need to be aware of their surroundings and position themselves safely.

HOW CAN OFFICERS STAY SAFE IN THEIR CARS?

THE PANELLISTS

- **Trevor Boulanger, RCMP occupational safety officer, Winnipeg, Man.**
- **Julie Furlotte, RCMP national manager of Moveable Assets, Ottawa, Ont.**
- **Sgt. Sam Tease, RCMP National Use of Force Unit, Ottawa, Ont.**
- **Bruce Christianson, Director, RCMP Occupational Safety Policy and Program, Ottawa, Ont., with Sgt. Rhéal Morin and Donald McInnes**

When an officer gets behind the wheel, it's one of the most dangerous things they'll do on shift. And that risk increases when they face one or more hazards on the road. We asked four RCMP experts to tell us the biggest dangers they face in their cars, and how police can reduce the risk of injury to themselves and to the public.

TREVOR BOULANGER

There's a deep-rooted belief within the RCMP that the most serious risks faced by officers and other employees stem from our clients and their violent behaviours. There's no question these risks are very real.

But the truth is, nearly 80 police officers have died in the line of duty during transportation-related incidents according to the RCMP's Honour Roll. These are traditional work tasks for which we have the greatest amount of influence and control over the outcome.

RCMP vehicles are safer than ever, the traffic laws are more stringent, officer driver training has never been better, Canada's road engineering improves every year and the medical world does amazing things for those injured in motor vehicle accidents. What else can we do in the RCMP to avoid losses associated with police motor vehicle collisions?

We must foster a culture of safe driving. Cadets are coming to Depot (RCMP Training Academy) with more life skills and experiences than ever before. With that comes new perspectives and approaches to solving occupational safety issues. We should encourage more ideas and alternative solutions that promote safety and reject behaviours that put others at risk.

All provincial highway acts in Canada allow police officers and other emergency services to drive above the posted speed limit under specific circumstances. There are also provisions for the exemption of seatbelt use. They are all worded slightly differently but deliver the same message: Only under a very specific set of circumstances should these exemptions be applied.

Think of ambulances and fire trucks in urban environments. The risk of rolling through an intersection at high speed and causing a collision just for the sake of getting to a call is far too high. Industry-wide changes to alter the behaviour of emergency vehicle operators has greatly reduced the risks to clients, the public and the operators. Emergency vehicles now nearly come to a complete stop at all intersections and the number of accidents associated with these services has plummeted.

You can't put a value on a life but it's easy to put a value on equipment. The financial costs of purchasing, building and disposing of a typical Ford Taurus involved in a write-off collision is more than $60,000. This is a significant loss.

We have some of the best equipment in the policing industry but equipment alone

can only protect us so far. Excessive speed and not wearing seatbelts amplifies the risks we face.

The things we do every day influence the future. If we want to reduce the frequency and severity of serious hazardous occurrences, we must work toward doing every job or task safely, even the mundane.

JULIE FURLOTTE

Police officers play an important role in vehicle maintenance. While the National Fleet Office sets vehicle maintenance policies, it's the responsibility of the detachments and units that have these vehicles to ensure the maintenance is completed at the local level. This includes vehicles, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and vessels.

We're all extremely busy and it can be a challenge to get everything done. It's easy to understand why vehicle maintenance can be overlooked or set aside to address later. We've all done it — even with our personal vehicles.

Police vehicles are a critical front-line tool, often referred to as a mobile office. They're equipped with operationally critical equipment such as weapons, communication devices and emergency lighting and sirens. If a vehicle isn't working properly, it can affect response times and the ability to provide backup.

Some tips on how to stay safe:

- Assign someone at the detachment/unit to be responsible for ensuring that vehicle maintenance gets done.
- ARI Fleet Management Corporation is the RCMP's fleet services provider. It offers a fleet card used to pay for fuel and maintenance and a web-based fleet management system. Use this system to monitor maintenance activities and get prompts when checkups are due.
- Be familiar with all the emergency equipment and features in the vehicle. When you are in an emergency situation, you want "muscle memory" to kick in and automatically know how to activate emergency features.
- Perform pre-trip inspections to make sure all emergency equipment is on hand and operating properly. The Police Vehicle Inspection Report can be used for this purpose.

Police vehicles are driven in all kinds of conditions and geographical areas. Manufacturers consider police vehicles to be "severe duty" and thus they have more robust maintenance requirements. Having a well-maintained, properly functioning vehicle in which to perform policing duties is key for every mobile office.

SGT. SAM TEASE

The RCMP's National Use of Force Unit is leading several initiatives aimed at promoting officers' safety when working in and around police vehicles.

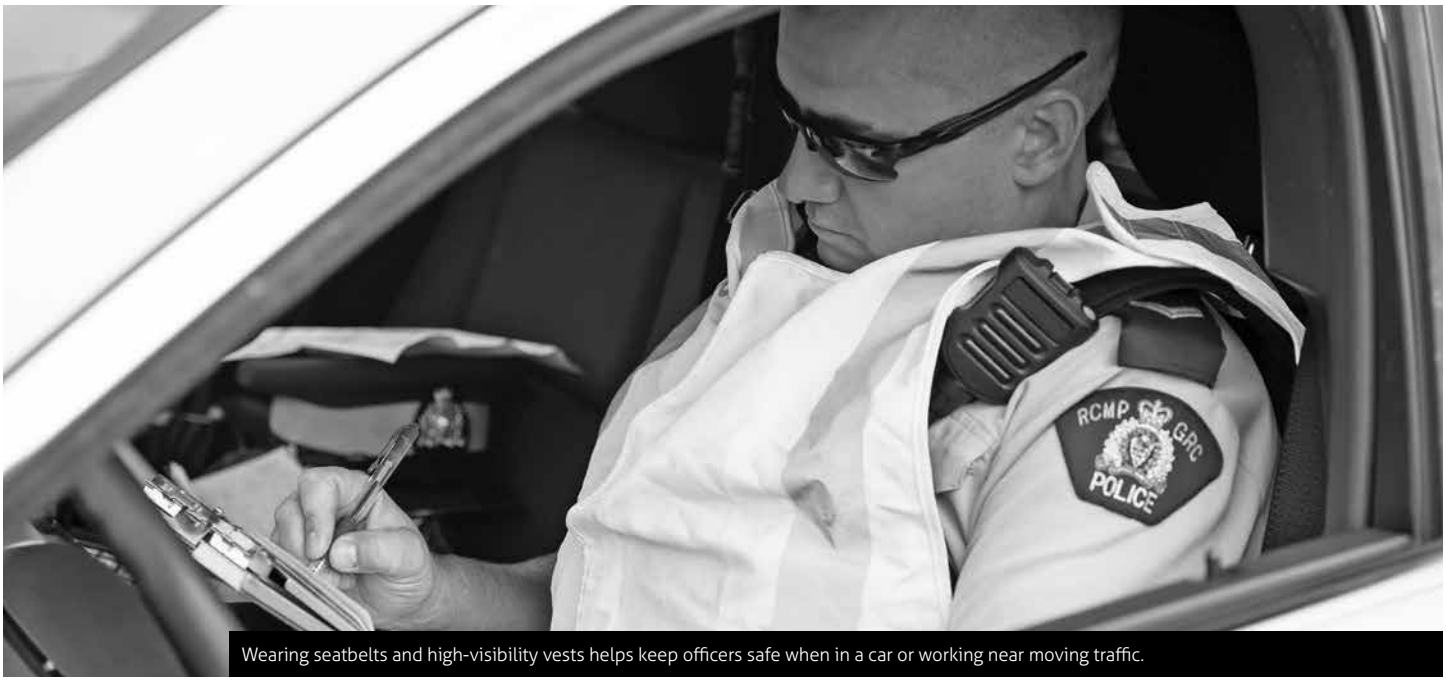
Launched in April 2016, the Immediate Action Rapid Deployment Outdoor Practical Course incorporates a session dedicated to safely working around your police vehicle when faced with a threat of a firearm.

During this mandatory course, all police officers are taught strategies on how to best use their vehicles to protect against a firearm — basically how to tactically work around a vehicle and exploit as much ballistic protection from the vehicle as possible. Officers then practise these techniques during realistic scenario training using marking cartridges. Response and feedback from course participants has been extremely positive.

At the beginning of 2018, National Use of Force in partnership with RCMP Learning & Development, updated the annual and mandatory Incident Management Intervention Model Online Course. The updates were made to improve officer safety when working around vehicles.

We all know that there are risks when conducting traffic stops — and the risks are different for each traffic stop. We wanted to bring awareness and create discussion around vehicles and traffic stops.

Maintaining good situational awareness is critical. Everything from setting up an informed traffic stop, knowing your areas of approach, knowing your escape routes and knowing which areas to avoid when interacting around vehicles will help you build a sound risk assessment. And a proper risk assessment will



Serge Gouin, RCMP

Wearing seatbelts and high-visibility vests helps keep officers safe when in a car or working near moving traffic.

Serge Gouin, RCMP

Using mobile work stations, cellphones and police radios while driving can increase an officer's risk of being distracted and must be used with care.

help you make good decisions, which in turn will lead to increased public and police safety.

The updates and additions to the course were meant to remind officers to think strategically when working around vehicles and to always remember to be mobile and try to position yourself safely.

At the end of the course, a new resource guide provides a link to our policy on shooting at vehicles.

Shooting at vehicles for the purpose of disabling that vehicle is not only against policy, it's also extremely unsafe. Shooting at a vehicle to immediately stop the motion of the vehicle has little to no effect, and actually increases the risk to the public and police.

National Use of Force has been working with several external policing partners to create a Compliant High Risk Vehicle Stop and Extraction Course. Officers within our unit identified different techniques that we teach during compliant high-risk takedowns that could be simplified and better aligned with other programs such as the IARD Outdoor Practical Course.

After watching and learning how other police services in Canada are performing these techniques, National Use of Force has updated and created a new vehicle stop and extraction course. This course is currently in the pilot stage. RCMP officers will see updates when this course is finalized and the techniques will be shared as stand-alone training offered by divisional (provincial) training units.

The Block Training 2020 update will also include a practical session to discuss the risks and highlight the dangers officers face while conducting traffic stops and working around vehicles. During this session, participants will be able to share strategies to keep them safe and prevent complacency.

Always be aware of your surroundings, help each other and stay safe.

BRUCE CHRISTIANSON

Law enforcement is a dangerous occupation. Every day, police officers risk their lives. The most obvious risks involve the unpredictable behaviours of dangerous suspects or armed assailants.

But a significant proportion of on-duty fatalities and serious injuries are the result of motor vehicle accidents. Officers can diminish those risks by evaluating their own actions towards personal safety.

Getting into a police car can be the most dangerous thing an officer does during a shift. With multiple hazards ranging from distractions (mobile work stations, cellphones, police radios), heavy traffic, poor weather, hazardous road conditions, pursuits, fatigue, ergonomics, wildlife and so on, officers face an increased risk of being involved in an accident.

Cellphone use, for instance, significantly degrades driver performance. Driving too fast for conditions or in excess of posted speed limits is another leading factor in many officer-involved crashes. Taking personal safety steps when on the road, such as wearing a seatbelt and applying defensive driving techniques, will reduce the risk of injury.

Another significant driving hazard is fatigue. It can be just as dangerous as impaired driving as it slows reaction time, decreases awareness and impairs judgment.

Lack of sleep is one of the most common causes of drowsy driving. Other factors that can contribute to fatigue include driving long distances, driving without rest breaks, driving during times when it is normally sleep time, taking medication and consuming drugs or alcohol. Fatigue is a particularly important issue for police officers who spend long hours at work.

Preventing and managing fatigue can reduce the loss of lives, injury, disability and property damage. Collisions involving police vehicles, vessels or other means of transport may not be the fault of the police officer. However, an officer's alertness, vigilance and response can make a difference.

Before getting behind the wheel, officers should plan for their safety and take action to mitigate the hazards that they have control over. Besides avoiding distractions, respecting speed limits, using defensive driving techniques, wearing their seat belts and ensuring they are well rested, officers can do a quick visual inspection of the vehicle, ensure the vehicle is regularly maintained, and wear their high-visibility vest or high-visibility patrol jacket when in or around moving traffic.

Career-ending injuries due to motor vehicle accidents are unfortunately not uncommon.

Stay safe and be aware of your surroundings. ■

WINNING WORKOUTS

GROUP FITNESS A SECRET WEAPON AGAINST FATIGUE, ILLNESS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

Nine years ago, civilian member Roxanne Blanchette would watch her police co-workers practise their fitness test, known as PARE, on the heli-pad visible from her office window at the Fredericton RCMP detachment.

"It's hard to watch people doing the things you want to do but can't," says Blanchette, who at the time weighed 260 pounds and had Type 2 diabetes. "I just wanted to be able to walk to get the mail without being out of breath."

Her life changed when she started working out for the first time with a co-worker who gave her a weight-lifting plan. To speed her progress, she joined a fitness boot camp. In less than five years, Blanchette lost 64 pounds and no longer needed medication for her diabetes.

"I'm not cranky, agitated or depressed. I have so much more energy, not just to enjoy life, but to enjoy people," says Blanchette, who now joins her co-workers in fitness activities throughout the year.

"To this day, walking into the gym is terrifying for me," says Blanchette. "But it isn't as awkward when you have five people doing it together."

Other detachments in New Brunswick are using group workouts to improve employees' physical and mental health and to increase their scores in the Physical Abilities Requirement Evaluation (PARE). The province has one of the highest PARE participation rates in the country.

PARE is used to test an officer's ability to withstand the rigours of operational police work, simulating a chase, a physical altercation and an arrest. Before receiving a badge, every RCMP cadet must pass it.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

A year and a half after she joined Campbellton detachment in N.B., Cst. Kelcie Levesque started a fitness routine with a co-worker. Soon, she was working out seriously five days a week with a group of colleagues who motivated and pushed her.

"As a woman, when I'm dealing with clients, it might look like I have a disadvantage because I'm smaller than them," says Levesque. "I feel more comfortable if I'm strong from lifting heavy weights. And it gives my co-workers confidence that I'm their backup."

The friendships she's built at the gym have extended beyond work, too. Levesque now regularly hangs out with many of the same co-workers, sometimes walking their dogs together around Campbellton's Sugarloaf Mountain.

"It creates a special bond between us that we wouldn't get if we only worked out together our four days on [shift], then didn't see each our four days off," she says.

Leveque says being fit also improves her mood, gives her more energy and helps her feel better overall.

MENTAL RESILIENCE

Sgt. JP MacDougall uses fitness to foster team spirit. A detachment commander in Woodstock, N.B., for the last three years, MacDougall says his employees build trust and open communication during workouts, which leads to staying physically healthy and mentally resilient.

Nearly two decades on the force has shown him that physical wellness is linked to mental wellness. "Nobody gets through 18 years in this organization, on the front line, without some exposure to trauma," says MacDougall.

Responding to critical incidents together creates a bond between officers that needs to be nurtured so they're comfortable opening up after a tough call, according to MacDougall. "If I'm able to get them together for a quick workout after a crappy set of shifts, it allows us to bond as a team," he says.

MacDougall encourages his officers to use 30 minutes of every shift for working out, an approach he thinks contributes to his team's low rate of sick leave.

"For me, it's an investment. I would rather give up a member for half an hour now, than lose them to mental illness later," he says.

The military veteran has also partnered with St. Stephen detachment, located two hours south of Woodstock, for a PARE challenge that he uses as another tool to connect with his staff.

"I don't really care about the scores," says MacDougall. "What it does is allow me to have the conversation if someone's struggling with something."

"When I'm working out, I can clear my mind," adds MacDougall. "Often, I think of a very specific problem at work, and by the end I have a solution."

Serge Gouin, RCMP

Roxanne Blanchette, second from left, lost 64 pounds and reversed her diabetes with group fitness and weight loss.

KEY TO A SAFE WORKPLACE

REPORTING INCIDENTS CAN PREVENT FUTURE INJURIES

By Paul Northcott

Policing can be a dangerous job and officers undergo regular training to protect themselves and the public. But operations aside, all RCMP employees also have a responsibility for their own safety and wellbeing.

"We're all part of the same team. Awareness of safety issues and strategies to reduce incidents have to be infused at all levels," says Amélie Talbot, a performance and project-management analyst with the RCMP's Occupational Safety Policy and Program. "That's why when it comes to health and safety, everyone in this organization has a role to play."

In 2015, an RCMP Occupational Health and Safety report identified the No. 1 cause of employee injuries was falls. A total of 601 falls — most of which were caused by slippery surfaces on RCMP property — were described as minor, while 98 were categorized as disabling. That means it was severe enough to impact an employee's ability to get to work and do their job.

REPORT INCIDENTS

Talbot's program area is involved in developing policies and procedures to improve workplace safety. She says one of the best and simplest things employees can do is to report incidents.

"Even if you don't get injured, you should still report the incident to your supervisor, who has a responsibility for identifying its cause and implementing corrective measures. If you don't report it, that incident could happen to someone else and have more serious impacts," says Talbot, who notes incident data is critical to identify the problem and take corrective measures.

She says employee participation is key to a safe workplace, and occupational safety officers (OSOs) in each province can help in the incident reporting process.

"The training of members and support staff in areas of health and safety is a critically important function within our unit," says Peter Lennon, an RCMP occupational safety officer.

He says OSOs provide safety advice and guidance to both employees and supervisors. They also support the RCMP so it complies with its duties and responsibilities under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*.

The 2015 report made a strong link between slips and footwear, while noting proper snow removal and taking measures to prevent slips and falls on wet surfaces was also key. The report also recommended the RCMP consider reviewing the footwear provided to officers.

Supt. Ian Cowan, director of the RCMP's Uniform and Equipment Program, is on the front line of officer care and involved in finding and procuring products for members that are functional, safe and comfortable.

Since 2016, his program has been searching for the best slip-resistant footwear possible. "It's a huge and complicated process," he says.

Cowan says there are design factors to consider like size, gender and the technical standards of the product.

CONSULTATION CRITICAL

He adds that while addressing safety is a primary concern, developing specifications must also include listening to people's concerns.

"When decisions get made in the absence of full consultation, you can get painted into a corner, and have products that won't make the officers happy," he says.

The remaining Top 4 causes of employee-related injuries from the 2015 report included injuries sustained while dealing with physical assaults; ergonomic-related injuries involving work-space configurations (like the inside of vehicles) or moving heavy equipment; car accidents and training injuries.

Part of an OSO's job is to work with RCMP safety committees and representatives in each province to help identify and address workplace hazards.

"They are the conduit for safety-related information within the divisions," says Lennon.

The officers deliver two-day health and safety committee training sessions so that RCMP employees who volunteer on those committees can understand how they work and can properly inspect workplaces and environments to ensure they're safe.

"The training is vital because it equips people with the capability to check their workplace for hazards and gives them the confidence to report issues and recommend the necessary measures to address them," says Lennon. ■

RCMP

Slips and falls are one of the top causes of employee injuries. Employees should report workplace hazards, like icy walkways, so they can be dealt with quickly.

SAFE HANDLING

FENTANYL PRECAUTIONS KEEP RISKS LOW FOR OFFICERS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

For most scenarios in which police officers have contact with fentanyl, wearing gloves appears to be enough to protect against overexposure.

This conclusion comes out of the RCMP's report on the police use of naloxone — the pharmaceutical drug that temporarily suspends the effects of opioid overdose. The report indicates that naloxone was given to only four officers during its first year of use by the RCMP between October 2016 and 2017.

"Initially there was a lot of misinformation about how potent fentanyl was, in terms of the quantity that could cause an overdose, and that led to the view that overexposure was likely," says Paul von Schoenberg, the national advisor on RCMP occupational hygiene. "We know now that that won't happen when you rely on your training and use good judgment to ensure your safety."

SKIN IN THE GAME

Absorption through the skin is possible but only likely if the substance is potent and stays on the skin for a long time, such as through a medical-grade trans-dermal patch similar to a nicotine patch.

"Based on the quantities of street-level fentanyl involved and the rate at which it's absorbed, it's very hard to be overexposed in that manner," says von Schoenberg, adding that wearing non-porous gloves and washing the skin with soap and cold water should prevent any possible adverse effects.

He says inhaling fentanyl dust at the scene is also unlikely because the number of airborne particles would be too few to cause overexposure. Touching the mouth, nose and eyes with powder on the hands is one way that fentanyl can be more easily absorbed into the body. However, this is still unlikely to result in overexposure.

"If I put it in your hand, it's not going to kill you. The key is ingestion," says Cpl. Eric Rajah, the RCMP's National Drug Coordinator and an experienced undercover operator. "If I come in contact with it at work, I handle it properly. I'm not going to ingest it."

Martine Chénier, RCMP

Cpl. Eric Rajah holds a package suspected to contain fentanyl that was purchased on the street during an undercover operation. He says overexposure through the skin is unlikely.

Rajah says the nature of the exchange and the way illicit drugs are packaged for sale on the street make it unlikely that a substance, which is rarely pure, would come in contact with a covert officer's bare skin. But if it does, time spent in the hand is minimal because exchanges are done quickly, and the drugs slipped into a pocket to keep them out of sight.

"They usually come in this tightly wrapped little paper flap," says Rajah. "I can open it carefully, it's not going to attack me. It's not going to blow up in my face. And I'm not going to sniff test it."

POLICING PRECAUTIONS

Supt. Shawna Baher led the component on fentanyl safety in the National Undercover Course between 2015 and 2018. She says that even officers who are covertly buying drugs on the street are at low risk of exposure if they follow their training.

"The members know to limit the amount of handling of the drug and to wash their hands as soon as they get back to their car, where they would have bottles of soap and water," she says.

But Baher adds, "it's always better to be safe than sorry" when it comes to taking precautions. In 2016, she ran the undercover operations where fentanyl was prolifically being sold in Surrey, B.C., at the onset of the crisis.

"We don't know what we're dealing with out there," says Baher. "The potency changes every time a dealer mixes a new version."

British Columbia continues to have the most cases of fentanyl overdoses nationally and has had the highest rate of naloxone use by RCMP officers in the country since 2014, when it first became a fentanyl hotspot. According to the naloxone report, of the total 244 times the drug was used by the RCMP on the public, 84 per cent were administered in B.C.

Baher was the second RCMP officer to administer naloxone in Canada and built the business case for naloxone use by the RCMP. ■

STUDYING STRESS

UNIVERSITY, RCMP COLLABORATE FOR MENTAL-HEALTH RESEARCH

By Dr. Nicholas Carleton, psychology professor, University of Regina, Saskatchewan

The University of Regina has begun its study on how policing affects the mental health of RCMP officers.

Research into the operational stress injuries (OSIs) of police officers, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is being conducted at the RCMP's Training Academy, known as Depot. Later this year, all RCMP cadets starting their training will have the chance to participate in the study.

Led by Dr. Nicholas Carleton at the Canadian Institute of Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT) in Regina, Sask., the project aims to identify psychological and physiological signs of trauma and stress-related disorders.

The study is part of the RCMP's mental health strategy for its officers and employees. The results of the RCMP Longitudinal Study of Operational Stress Injuries are expected to help develop long-term plans to support the overall mental health of RCMP officers and further reduce stigma around mental-health issues.

While participation in the study is voluntary, the research team hopes that all cadets participate.

The research project is designed to collect critically necessary data and identify a potential new gold standard in mental-health care for all participants. By becoming involved in the project, participants will be receiving unprecedented levels of mental-health attention.

Participating cadets will contribute in a number of ways. They will be supplied with smartphones and watches, and a shirt that will monitor real-time heart rate. This technology will allow researchers to monitor physiological changes as they go about their regular duties, both at Depot and in the field.

The cadets will also complete several psychological assessments and provide regular diary notes on a daily or monthly basis.

Some cadets will receive specially designed psychological training that they'll be able to use in both their professional and personal lives. It's believed that those who participate in the study will be better protected against PTSD, and will be better prepared to deal with the realities of police work.

While the commitment to the project will be five and a half years, researchers hope that participants will benefit throughout their careers.

The RCMP recognizes the importance of good mental health. While the RCMP has already put in place various prevention and intervention measures designed to improve psychological health and safety for its employees, it continues to lose the services of many officers as a result of mental health-related issues.

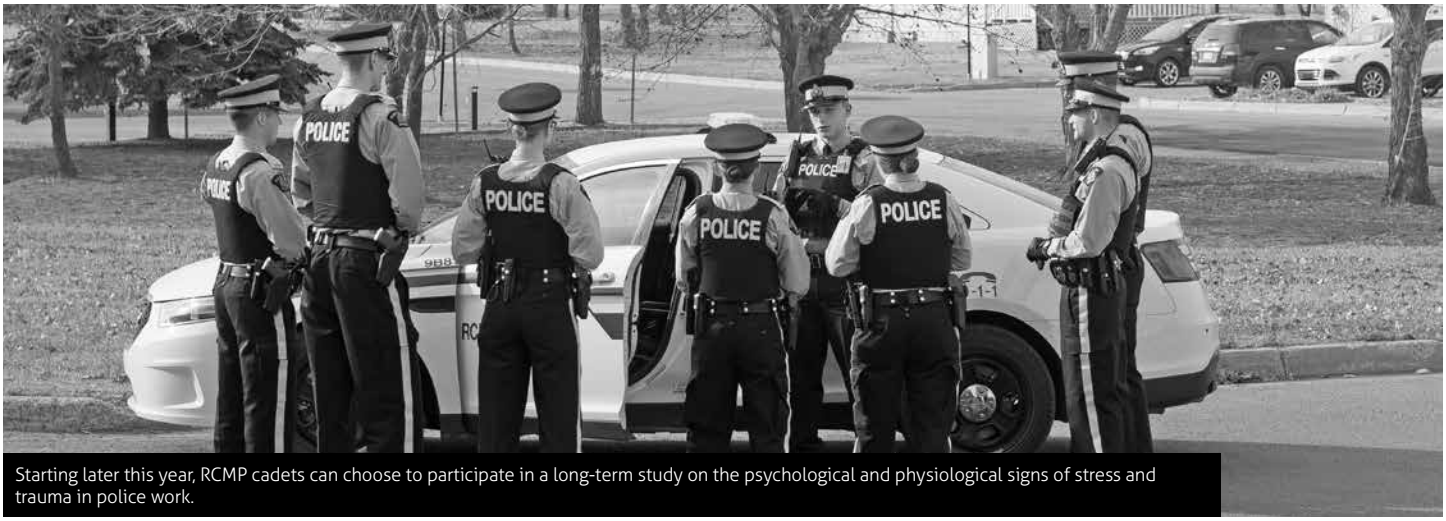
According to Veterans Affairs Canada, in 2014, 41.7 per cent of long-term disability claims for RCMP officers who were no longer with the force, were related to mental-health conditions. A recent national study shows that substantial portions of participating RCMP officers screened positive for PTSD (30 per cent), major depressive disorder (32 per cent), and generalized anxiety disorder (23 per cent), among other mental-health challenges (Carleton et al., in press).

The University of Regina is recognized for its work in clinical psychology, including PTSD and other OSIs. The RCMP Longitudinal Study of Operational Stress Injuries aligns with the university's research priority areas and builds on the ongoing collaborations with the RCMP Training Academy.

In addition, the University of Regina is the administrative hub for the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT), which works with existing academic research resources and helps to develop new research and research capacity.

The research project has the potential to benefit the mental health of the RCMP. It will inform policies and programming by helping to build a National Standard of Canada Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace into actionable and measurable improvements — first for the RCMP and ultimately for all Canadian public safety personnel. ■

Andrew Marshall, RCMP



Starting later this year, RCMP cadets can choose to participate in a long-term study on the psychological and physiological signs of stress and trauma in police work.

just THE FACTS

REPEAT OFFENDERS

Why do some ex-convicts relapse into crime? The answer can be complex and contradictory. But some facts are clear: keeping people out of jail in the first place helps them avoid a second or multiple incarcerations and can reduce the financial burdens placed on prisons and support programs.

Recidivism is the rate of re-offending.

It's been defined as a return to correctional supervision on a new conviction within two years of completing probation, parole, a conditional sentence or a jail sentence of six months or more.

Risk factors associated with re-offending

- Age *
- Attitude to probation
- Number and type of prior conviction
- Gender
- Address changes
- Time employed

* Age is one of the most important predictors of recidivism. Criminal activity peaks in the late teens or early adult years, then gradually declines.

Predisposing factors linked to re-offending

- Quality of a person's marital or family relations
- Friendships
- Financial and emotional stability
- Alcohol or drug use

Did you know?

In Surrey, B.C., RCMP and youth probation officers have a new partnership to keep troubled youth from getting more involved in the judicial system. The program works with young people to help them comply with court-ordered conditions and break the cycle of offending.

Among repeat offenders:

- Nearly 75 per cent have multiple prior convictions
- Nearly one-third have a prior conviction

The most successful ways to reduce recidivism among offenders

- prison-based and community-based treatment programs
- substance-abuse facilities

IN CANADA

Correctional Service of Canada reports that

Recidivism rates decrease dramatically when offenders complete substance-abuse programs.

Every dollar spent on correctional programming returns four dollars in saved incarceration costs.

Offenders who participate in correctional programs while in custody are less likely to reoffend.

TRUST IS EVERYTHING

POLICING APPROACH FORGES RELATIONSHIPS ON MI'KMAQ RESERVE

By Patricia Vasylchuk

At the RCMP's Elsipogtog detachment in New Brunswick, an eagle feather rests on top of a dresser in Sgt. Bill Collier's office. Receiving one is the highest honour among Indigenous people.

The eagle feather is Collier's third overall, but the first for the unique way he and other RCMP officers at the detachment are policing the reserve.

An agreement between the community, the province and the RCMP means all parties provide input on community policing matters, including determining the band's priorities. Officers regularly meet with the band chief, council and a group of elders, and participate in Indigenous activities together.

"If you don't have trust, you don't have anything," says Collier about the detachment's approach to policing the band of more than 3,000 First Nations residents.

Candid conversations are helping the groups better understand each other's differences and improve relationships, which help both community living and law enforcement.

Serge Gouin, RCMP

To show respect for the First Nations community they police, Cst. Boyd Milliea and other officers at the Elsipogtog RCMP detachment don't wear police hats while working on the reserve.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

Collier says regular communication diffuses mistrust and resentment that can develop when people don't have a clear understanding of the police process. Educating the community about it is as much a part of policing as kicking in doors, he says.

For Cst. Vanessa DeMerchant and her detachment colleagues, that open approach included participating in healing circles in Elsipogtog.

At the beginning, officers were asked not to bring their guns as a sign of respect, and they complied. But that changed after the 2014 and 2018 shootings in Moncton and Fredericton. Now, DeMerchant says they wear their guns without damaging the trust they've developed with residents.

"Sharing with them what police work looks like, they understand us more," says DeMerchant. "It's nice to have that open communication with people."

Being involved in the band's judicial process is another reason Elsipogtog detachment officers are well respected in the community.

DeMerchant says officers attend sentencing circles, an Indigenous version of a sentencing hearing, which include the offender, members of the community, Crown counsel, police and the judge. Participants sit in a circle each taking turns telling the offender how their actions have affected them or others in the community. The judge considers all statements before sentencing and the approach is meant to help heal the offender rather than only hand down a punishment.

"Attending these circles gives people a relationship with us," says DeMerchant. "It shows them that we follow through. We don't just abandon them."

The detachment — which is made up of 13 police officers and two public service employees — has adjusted some of its own approaches to policing to be more mindful of the culture.

After learning that wearing their hats was considered a sign of intimidation and disrespect to band residents, who are predominantly Mi'kmaq, officers stopped wearing them on the reserve, according to Cst. Boyd Milliea, who grew up in the community.

COMMON LANGUAGE

Milliea's been using his native language to improve relationships between First Nations people and the police since he worked his first reserve in 2000. When interacting with people he thinks may be Indigenous, he begins the conversation in Mi'kmaq and switches to English only if the other person initiates.

"It's a trust issue. Language tends to be a barrier," says Milliea, who speaks fluent Mi'kmaq, the main language used on the Elsipogtog reserve. "Somehow that tends to calm the situation down."

As a child, Milliea saw his father struggle to understand the local police officers who spoke in a thick French accent, which led to a strained relationship. But it was his first positive interaction with band police that set in motion his future career in the RCMP.

"They were driving by and I called them pigs. They stopped and reversed and started talking to me in my language," says Milliea. "After that, I thought if I worked around the reserve and talked to people the way they did to me, maybe interactions wouldn't be as bad."

MAKING BETTER-FORMED OFFICERS

MUSICAL RIDE STRENGTHENS KEY POLICE SKILLS

By Travis Poland

Officers with the RCMP's Musical Ride are known for their horsemanship, but their time with the ride is more than an equine experience. The ride reinforces skills that are invaluable to police work.

Musical Ride officers spend between two and three years away from regular work caring for horses, practising the show and travelling across Canada performing.

But time out of the field doesn't mean officers are out of the loop.

Cst. Jennifer Dowden and Cst. Scott McArthur, who both returned to the Musical Ride after a few years of police work, say the teamwork, time management, communication and physical abilities needed for the ceremonial ride are closely related to policing.

TIME KEEPING AND TEAMWORK

"Time management is a major factor," says McArthur, adding that when the show arrives at a venue, there can be less than an hour to prepare.

In that time, horses need fresh food and water, a clean stall and grooming before being tacked and ready.

Dowden, who's been with the RCMP for 12 years, says making the best use of time is an essential skill for all police officers.

"Time management is one of the biggest things you learn right from Depot (RCMP Training Academy)," she says. "You fine tune those skills with the Musical Ride because you're working with 40 people and 36 horses."

Both McArthur and Dowden say that maintaining the tight Musical Ride schedule is made easier with a strong team.

"Everyone's assigned duties so they know their job," says Sgt. Jeremey Dawson, an instructor who's been with the ride since 2006.

Dowden says that officers rely on one another to get separate tasks done and keep the show running smoothly.

"Similarly, if there's a traffic incident and a road needs to be shut down, I can count on my partner to do that," says McArthur about general police duty.

While communication with each officer on the ride is essential, being on the ride also improves officers' ability to speak with Canadians.

Dawson says people may be more comfortable speaking to an officer wearing the red serge on top of a horse than an officer on foot, which can lead to more interactions with the public.

"We learn from each community and find out what issues are consistent across the country," Dawson says. "When officers go back into the field, they have an idea of the issues."

"When the Musical Ride visits, people want to see you and want to talk to you. It refreshes your perspective on being a police officer," says Dowden.

TAKING THINGS IN STRIDE

The RCMP Musical Ride began as a way to show off the equestrian skills needed for policing the Prairies in the late 1800s. The days of widespread mounted police units have passed, but everyday policing is still relevant to the ride — especially the physical aspect.

"This is one of the most physically demanding courses in the RCMP," says Dawson.

Officers go through fast-paced training, learning how to ride and care for horses. Many who join have no prior horse experience.

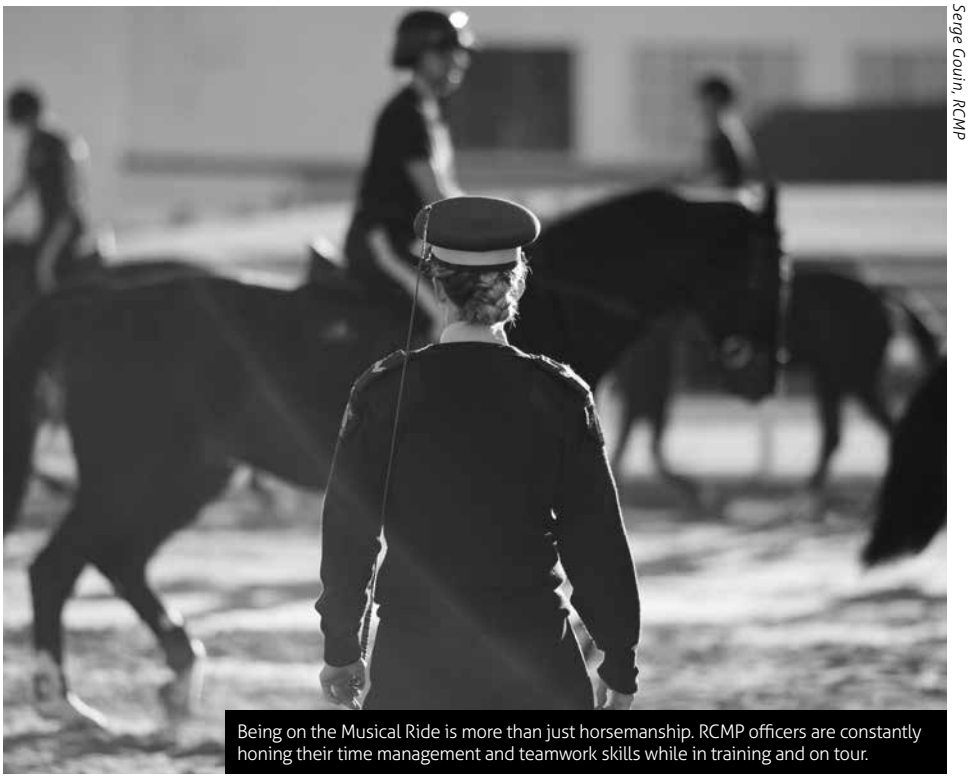
"When your body's not used to riding a horse twice a day, five days a week, you get rubbed and sore," Dowden says. "It's easy to get hurt riding horses."

"But with most injuries, people are able to jump back up onto the saddle," says McArthur, who joined the RCMP in 2008. "This year I was kicked in the thigh by a horse. Did it hurt? Yes. But we work through that pain."

And maintaining their policing skills while on tour is more than just good practice — it's necessary. In 1991, officers on the ride were redeployed to security assignments at government buildings, embassies and consulates, due to the Persian Gulf War and an increased threat of terrorism.

"Some members may think that going to the Musical Ride may negatively impact their career, but I can honestly say it doesn't," says McArthur.

"We help make better-formed members through and through," Dawson says. ■



Serge Gouin, RCMP

Being on the Musical Ride is more than just horsemanship. RCMP officers are constantly honing their time management and teamwork skills while in training and on tour.

CALLING THE SHOTS

INCIDENT COMMANDER CONSIDERS SAFETY ON SCENE

By Patricia Vasylchuk

When the RCMP responds to a crisis situation in New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island deciding when to send in a tactical vehicle, bomb squad or canine unit is Supt. Lucie Dubois's call. As a critical incident commander for this region, she's one of six officers who rotate calling the shots on deploying specialized units. Patricia Vasylchuk spoke to Dubois about her role and the challenges.

WHEN DOES AN INCIDENT BECOME CRITICAL?

It becomes critical when there's a high-level threat that requires a strategically planned tactical response that goes beyond what general duty police officers can provide, like when they need help from specialized units like the emergency response and explosives teams.

WHAT INCIDENTS ARE COMMON?

The majority of the incidents we respond to are for armed standoffs. Usually, it's a person who's barricaded themselves and is threatening suicide or threatening to hurt hostages.

WHAT DOES A CRITICAL INCIDENT COMMANDER DO?

A critical incident commander is in charge when the incident is unfolding. So initially, I would get a call from a dispatcher explaining the situation and what on-duty officers have done up to that point. From there, I conduct a risk assessment and determine if specialized teams are needed. When the situation warrants it, I deploy all the specialized teams, like Emergency Response Teams and Police Dog Services, as well as equipment. The critical incident commander is responsible for all planned actions of the specialized units and all the decisions on the ground.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE SCENE?

We set up a triangular command structure with all the people and technology we need. In each corner there's the emergency response team lead, the negotiators team lead, and us. Then, together, we decide the next steps. Local police are involved in the response as well. We're there to support them, because once we leave, they will carry on the investigation.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A DECISION?

The safety of everyone involved is the priority and that includes the person causing the incident. So we look at the threats, such as the suspect's background and current frame of mind, what weapons are involved, the risk to the public, and even the location and time of day. I also think about my officers. Even though they're well trained and capable, I'm still putting them at risk. We use a measured approach — so the least aggressive — to resolve each situation.

HOW DOES LOCATION DETERMINE THE RESPONSE?

Location often presents challenges whether it be rural or urban. It's very import for the specialized units to have the means to address issues such as distance, low cell reception or areas that can only be accessed via water ways, like Grand Manan Island. These units are constantly working with partner agencies like other police departments and with cell providers to build contingencies or use a different type of technology to overcome the challenges. So we adjust and respond accordingly.

WHAT ABOUT WEATHER?

We're able to respond just as well in the winter as we can in the summer. But having people contained in an area while we're negotiating means we have to consider the length of time and the cold.

HOW MANY CALLS DO YOU GET?

It varies. You can get three calls in one week or you can have a few weeks with nothing. Last year, we responded to about 20 calls in New Brunswick with full deployments.

HOW LONG BEFORE AN INCIDENT IS RESOLVED?

In my experience, it's anywhere between four and 24 hours.

WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

Teamwork is crucial. We have a team of capable, highly trained professionals and specialized units that work well together. We'd never be able to do it without them. I feel 100 per cent confident in the team. ■

Serge Gouin, RCMP

As a critical incident commander, Supt. Lucie Dubois decides when and how to deploy specialized teams and equipment during a crisis.

LOUD AND CLEAR

NEW POLICE RADIO SYSTEM OFFERS BETTER RANGE

By Patricia Vasylchuk

Pascal Milette, RCMP

A new radio communication system will soon be distributed to RCMP detachments in Central Canada. The system connects officers to the strongest signal and allows more conversations on the same channel, important features during an emergency.

A new radio communication system used during the G7 summit in Quebec last summer is being deployed for use by the RCMP in Central Canada. The system provides officers with a smarter solution for communicating during emergencies.

The radio network is built using technology that's similar to cellular technology. It's a more efficient way for police officers to communicate, especially during critical incidents, according to Chris Quizi, who works with the RCMP's National Radio Services.

"When an event like the attack on Parliament Hill happens everybody starts using their cellphones to get in touch with loved ones or checking for news updates, and that jams up the cellphone networks," says Quizi, the manager in charge of the radio renewal project. "That's why we build dedicated radio networks. So in the event that something major happens, officers have a reliable way to communicate."

Work has been underway since last June to set up more than 200 radio sites in Ontario and Quebec by 2023.

STRONGEST SIGNAL

Using a network of cellular towers linked by fibre optic cables, the new radios automatically connect to towers with the strongest signal. This allows officers to stay within range of their colleagues as they travel across long distances, and not have to change channels as they travel out of range of a tower, as they do now using the existing radios.

Radios are encrypted making it impossible for someone other than RCMP officers or partnering police agencies to listen in on conversations. A lost or stolen radio can also be disabled remotely.

What's more, multiple conversations can occur on one channel at the same time without hearing each other. In contrast, the traditional system allows only one conversation at a time, and anyone tuned to the same channel can hear it, as long as they're within the tower's coverage area in the same region.

Sgt. Eric Boudreault was in charge of 201 Emergency Response Team members and 42 police officers providing tactical operations during the summit last June. Stationed at the command centre in Valcartier, Que., Boudreault directed officers who were situated up to 244 kilometres away between three main locations.

Using the new radio system, his team was even able to maintain contact with officers on the ground while flying VIPs between Bagotville, La Malbaie and Quebec City.

"The reception was amazing," says Boudreault. "I was able to speak to all my team leads in each location even though the geography of the ground was very difficult."

Ensuring crisp, clear reception across the area of approximately 100 square kilometres of mountainous terrain was the biggest challenge for the radio communication team, says Erick Soucy, who was in charge of the project in Quebec.

According to Soucy, to ensure the best reception for operational teams on site, 42 radio sites were set up, including 14 new towers that were constructed in just 10 months — a process that can take up to two years for just one tower under normal circumstances.

After the G7 summit, most of the radio sites were decommissioned. The exceptions were the back-up core in Quebec City, which will be moved to Ottawa, and the main core, which will be used in Montreal.

NEW BEGINNINGS

The RCMP hopes to use existing towers owned by cellular providers, provincial government or private companies for the majority of radio sites planned for the deployment in the next five years. But constructing new towers hasn't been ruled out if it means improving reception in some areas.

Up to 120 radio sites are planned for Quebec and 88 in Ontario. The goal is to have 90 per cent of the sites running by 2021, according to Quizi.

"It's getting to the point where the old radios are unsupported and that's why we need to put in the new system," says Quizi. "At a certain point we can't get pieces for the hardware and the vendor doesn't support the software."

RCMP in each province oversee their own radio communications with some sharing systems with provincial governments and others with municipal police forces. Doing so means each province is in varying stages of a system's lifecycle.

"This was a great opportunity where Ontario and Quebec needed a new system at the same time and it made more sense to partner together," says Quizi.

As the radios get replaced with ones using the new system, the old equipment at each radio site will be removed and offered to RCMP detachments in other parts of Canada. ■

COPING WITH LOSS

CAMP HELPS FAMILIES DEAL WITH WITH OFFICER DEATHS

By Paul Northcott

RCMP

Camp F.A.C.E.S. provides the families of first responders who died in the line of duty, suddenly or by suicide, the chance to be with others who have gone through a similar experience.

Dozens of people gather at a family camp each summer to deal with the loss of loved ones — Canadian first responders who died in the line of duty, suddenly or by their own hand.

"It's a club none of us want to be part of," says Nadine Larche, whose husband, Cst. Douglas Larche, was one of three RCMP officers killed in a string of shootings in Moncton, N.B., on June 4, 2014.

The family members of police officers, firefighters, paramedics or other first responders, know they are high-risk jobs. But each year, some who work in those fields die unexpectedly — leaving spouses and children to cope.

It's one of the reasons why Larche attends Camp F.A.C.E.S. — Family and Children of Emergency Services — which provides families who have endured such a loss, the chance to be with others who have gone through a similar experience.

"When I first arrived, someone took me under their wing," says Larche, who's grateful for the opportunity to attend the camp. "They said: 'You're going to be OK'. But in the moment, you're thinking you won't be OK, you don't know how you will be. But then you come to realize, in time, you will be and you learn to push through."

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Organized and supported by the Canadian Critical Incident Stress Foundation, the camp has provided services to children and spouses since 2015. There are games and fun activities for children and teens, and the foundation provides trained mental-health counsellors.

The support also continues informally beyond the five-day camp.

There are texts, emails and phone calls all year long among the spouses — who can attend throughout their lifetime — and children.

There are even some impromptu get togethers.

"It's just important to stay connected so that when one of us is having a bad day, we know we can reach out to someone who knows what we're going through," says Larche.

Her three daughters, who are 14, 13 and eight, have also attended the camp for the past four years.

"They've made friends with other kids who've experienced a similar tragedy and they really enjoy connecting with them," says Larche.

The girls will be eligible to attend the camp, where costs associated with accommodations, food, activities and transportation are covered by the foundation, until they turn 18.

Larche says the emotional needs of her daughters, when it comes to dealing with their father's death, are evolving over time.

"As they get older they understand more what happened and they have to deal with that," says Larche. "But at the camp they get the chance to feel normal with other kids their age, and if they want to talk about things, they can."

PASSING IT FORWARD

RCMP Cst. Peter Neily, a member of the voluntary advisory board for Camp F.A.C.E.S., has helped organize activities for the younger children and teens for the past three years.

He says the camp offers a lot of support to families and he's been impressed to see returning spouses and teens do the same for first-timers.

"Sometimes you'll see somebody come in for the first time and it's like they're not ready to be there," says Neily. "But then they'll stay and come back the next year, and then by year three they're suddenly offering support to others. It's an amazing transition to see."

Larche says it's a job she's already doing.

"There's sadly always new people joining the club. But I now feel the need to reach out and tell them about the camp and how much it helped me and my girls," says Larche, who admits in the wake of her husband's death she has felt isolated and would still like the RCMP to do more to support the families who've suffered such a devastating loss.

Neily says Camp F.A.C.E.S., which also offers an event for families living with an emergency service worker who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, reflects organizers' desire to tell these families they're not being forgotten.

"The families are heavily involved in the job (of being an RCMP officer or first responder)," says Neily, who added efforts are made to reach out to the families during holiday periods such as Christmas. "They're part of the extended police community and, through a camp like this, we want to maintain that social network for them." ■