



Corporate Report

NO: R101

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REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **May 3, 2007**
FROM: **Fire Chief / Chief of Police** FILE: **7450-30**
SUBJECT: **Crime Reduction Strategy – Expand the Meth Watch Program**

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council receive this report as information.

BACKGROUND

The growing meth epidemic in Canada's cities is usually the territory of police, health and social service agencies.

Meth is a common term for crystal methamphetamine, a highly addictive drug that affects the body's nervous system and initially makes users feel invincible and euphoric. Meth can be cheaply and easily manufactured using many products – referred to as precursors – found in hardware and drug stores, including acetone, hydrochloric acid, red phosphorous, ephedrine, lye, Draino, iodine, lighter and brake fluid, cold remedies and camper fuel.

Meth's inexpensive production results in a cheap street cost, making it increasingly the drug of choice among addicts. B.C. police say a single dose of meth can cost as little as \$5 and an addict may support a habit for as little as \$20 per day, according to *Clandestine Drug Laboratories in British Columbia* (Plecas et al., 2005), a report by the International Centre for Urban Research Studies at the University College of the Fraser Valley.

Even more alarming are recent studies that indicate meth may be prevalent in B.C. high schools. In a 2005 *Institute for Safe Schools for British Columbia* survey, at least eight per cent of the 13,176 high school students polled in three school districts used crystal meth during the 2004/05 school year – mostly on school property (Waterhouse and Dow, 2005). As well, close to half reported using meth on school grounds more than once per week.

The situation is similar in Surrey, where a 2005 school district survey indicated 1,260 (nine per cent) of the 14,000 high school students had used meth off of school grounds, while 980 students (seven per cent) had used meth while at school.

Also among the district survey results was the startling statistic that four per cent of Grade 8 students and three per cent of Grade 9 students said they use meth more than once a week.

In response to Surrey's growing meth problem, the Surrey Methamphetamine Regional Task Force (SMART) was formed in February 2006 following the model of a successful pilot project in neighbouring Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows.

SMART's 90-day awareness campaign spawned the Meth Watch program in the community that targets businesses that sell meth precursors. Surrey's Fire Chief chaired SMART's precursor committee. RCMP and Surrey fire fighters helped promote the awareness campaign by distributing information about the precursors used in production of meth to Surrey businesses.

A strong relationship exists between drugs, crime and threats to public safety. In a 2003 report on auto crime in Surrey called *Perception vs. Reality*, police estimated that most auto thieves are addicts and at least 70 per cent are chronic meth users. Stolen vehicles are often used to commit secondary crimes, including arson, the report said. As well, reckless driving comes with the territory and sometimes results in fatalities; between 1999 and 2001, 81 deaths resulted from stolen vehicles in Canada.

The production of drugs brings considerable safety hazards into residential neighbourhoods. The UCFV report *Clandestine Drug Laboratories in British Columbia*, which studied the 33 clandestine labs found by police from Apr. 2, 2004 to Mar. 31, 2005, said 58 per cent of the labs were in houses or apartments, most of them rented.

Fire and explosion are known risks at clandestine labs, the report said. A review of files revealed that leaky chemical containers were found at 33 per cent of the sites, while burn hazards were found at 64 per cent of the sites. As well, fire was involved in one-third of the labs that were operational at the time of police intervention.

In addition, the labs pose environmental risks from improper disposal of chemicals and equipment, and the presence of weapons threatens public safety. Firearms were found at 31 per cent of the labs, and other weapons, such as knives, were found 23 per cent of the time.

DISCUSSION

Working to eliminate drug labs is important, but it is only one part of the solution. Each day emergency responders see the other side of the equation – the results of drug addictions – as they respond to emergencies around the community. It's clear a more holistic approach to the problem is needed – one that involves all members of the community.

The fire service is making a long-term commitment to help curtail the Meth problem in Surrey through the following strategies:

1. **Surrey Firefighters' Charitable Society** - made a commitment to help fight their community's drug problem. In September, the Surrey Firefighters' Charitable Society – a project of the Surrey Firefighters' Association – announced a pledge of \$1 million towards fighting mental health and addiction-related issues in Surrey.

The funds will be split three ways:

- \$100,000 for an endowment to establish an lectureship on research into mental health and addiction at Simon Fraser University's Surrey campus, allowing for an expert to share research findings at SFU and speak at community forums throughout the region;
- \$500,000 for a mental health and addictions crisis unit at Surrey Memorial Hospital's new Emergency Centre; and
- \$400,000 towards future city programs that provide long-term solutions to crime and the cycle of addiction.

It's hoped the firefighters' funds will not only help bridge the gap in services for addicts that exists after the police do their job, but also encourage other organizations and businesses to provide funding.

2. **Suppression Crew Level** – The Suppression crew will identify locations based on fire inspections where meth may be manufactured. The Fire Department staff will inform the owner/tenant about the Meth Watch Program and why their business could be involved in the production of meth. In addition the owner or tenant will be invited to become a member of the Meth Watch Program and be provided with appropriate materials. All activities will be logged on inspection forms, including that the business is a participant in the Meth Watch Program.
3. **Involvement of other City Departments** –
 - A supply of meth watch materials such as the customer information handout for retailers will be made available to the business licence processing staff for distribution as part of the business license approval process.
 - Outside city departments (parks/recreation, engineering, bylaws etc.) will be provided with awareness training, specifically on how to recognise a meth dump site.
 - Waste Management, the City's garbage collection contractor, has employees on City streets on every weekday. These employees will be provided with awareness training with respect to meth manufacturing and dump sites.
4. **Community Level** – Education programs will be delivered to community groups on what to watch for in relation to stemming the potential for Meth in their neighbourhood. Block watch and neighbourhood watch programs will be specifically targeted.

CONCLUSION

In August 2005 tougher laws were enacted by the Canadian Government in relation to the consequences of being convicted for the production and/or distribution of methamphetamine (increased from ten years to life in prison). At the same time, precursor control regulations were also improved. These actions coupled with aggressive enforcement and public education, are expected to curb the number of methamphetamine labs in Canada and hopefully result in a decline in the street use of meth.

In 2006 the State of Washington confirmed a five-year trend of declining meth labs and related dump sites. In the USA, the Department of Ecology cleanup teams handled 390 dump sites in 2006, down from 806 in 2005. United States authorities say restricting the sale methods for meth has contributed immensely to the declining number of meth labs.

It is important that the City of Surrey should continue to exercise all reasonable efforts to eliminate the production, sale and use of meth in Surrey. The impacts of this drug are significant to both the user and to society in general.



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