

YRP Chief defends 'compliance' message after string of high-profile crimes

Comments from York Regional Police Chief Jim MacSween on how residents can protect themselves amid a rash of recent crimes drew ire from community members last week and a clarification on the part of the Chief.

Speaking out on recent high-profile crimes in Vaughan and Richmond Hill, MacSween was asked to comment on remarks made by Premier Doug Ford on the right to defend one's own home.

While MacSween said he had 'no concerns' with the Premier's recent comments, he said that unless laws change, 'we know the best defence for most people is to comply.'

'It sometimes can fall on deaf ears when members feel like they have to take matters into their own hands, and the only thing I'd say is, if we are going to rely on our community members to take matters into their own hands to solve this problem, we'll have all failed our community.'

'I'll leave the political comments to the politicians and let them have those conversations, but for now, the laws are written [and] we'll follow those laws.'

Ahead of the Chief fielding that question, the York Regional Police outlined a number of recommendations residents should follow 'to remain vigilant of their surroundings.'

These included: ensure your home surveillance systems are functioning and recording; ensure your home alarm systems are functioning and audible; have a cell phone charged and available in case of emergency; ensure you have sufficient lighting on the exterior of your residence and that sight lines to entrance points are clear; ensure all of your locking mechanisms are working and in good order; and be a good neighbour and look out for each other.

The YRP also recommended having a safety plan shared with your family in the case of emergency, and this includes ensuring all persons in a residence have a readily-accessible cell phone; and making one's home 'less attractive to becoming a target.'

'Don't keep excessive valuables within your residence,' they said. 'Most importantly, we're encouraging you not to engage with the suspects or put up resistance. Comply with demands for your property that are being made to ensure additional violence is not targeted towards you or your family.'

The message of compliance, however, was criticized quickly out of the gate, causing MacSween to issue a further statement on Friday to clarify his stance.

'Some took exception to a piece of guidance I provided to citizens in the event that they are faced with an armed intruder at their home,' he said. 'Following these crimes and in light of broader, nationwide conversations about citizens' personal safety I understand this reaction. I understand the feelings of pain and anger boiling to the surface in our community. And I understand why people feel the need to fight back, and are dissatisfied with any direction to do otherwise.'

'When I told citizens not to take matters into their own hands, it had nothing to do with politics, or with concern over force used against the perpetrators of home invasions. It was suggested as a tactic in the hopes of preserving lives, should citizens be confronted with an armed intruder. When it comes to defending property, material items can be replaced but lives cannot.'

'There is no one piece of advice to offer to citizens who are faced with an intruder in their home but calling 9-1-1 immediately and avoiding engagement with the suspects has proven to be an effective course of action. These situations are dynamic, chaotic, and difficult to assess in the moment. Ultimately, a citizen should do what they deem necessary to preserve their own safety, and the safety of their loved ones.'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter