

YRP to launch two new programs to combat rising crime rates



New initiatives from the York Regional Police will roll out this month tackling auto theft and carjackings as the Police grapple with a 106 per cent increase in carjackings over the last 12 months.

The programs were announced in Aurora last week by York Regional Police by Chief Jim MacSween in an update on 2024 crime statistics to date.

While MacSween reassured the public that York Region was "safe," the statistics presented last week illustrate worrying trends.

"In 2024, the Region has seen a 92 per cent increase in shootings – a total of 46 since January of this year," said Chief MacSween. "We have also seen a 106 per cent increase in carjackings for a total of 64 since January. Equally troubling, since 2019, over a five-year period, we have seen a 400 per cent increase in carjackings, which are violent and traumatizing for victims and their families. Illegal handguns have become all too easy to access with limited consequences for criminals and almost all the guns being used in these crimes are illegal handguns, many of which are being smuggled across the border from the US.

"The surge in gun violence can be attributed to organized crime rings who are obtaining and using illegal hand guns to commit a number of offences. Organized crime is also behind both the nationwide increase in auto thefts we've all witnessed and the ongoing conflict in the tow truck industry. We continue to see some tow truck organizations are resorting to both gun violence and arson as a means of threatening their business rivals. The trend in violent crime is a major concern and will continue to be a top priority for York Regional Police for the remaining months of 2024 and will continue to be as we move forward into 2025. We will continue to invest the resources necessary to combat violent and organized crime to ensure that the residents of York Region are not only kept safe, but they also feel safe."

The upcoming Carjacking Task Force will focus solely on investigating these crimes "with the goal of identifying and arresting those responsible for victimizing our community," said Chief MacSween, noting this is a particular issue for York Region's southernmost and most populous cities – Markham, Richmond Hill, and Vaughan.

"This task force will expand on the existing efforts of YRP's investigative team who have been leading a Province-wide task force as well," he continued.

The second initiative will be what he described as a Comprehensive Auto Theft Prevention Campaign to "educate" the community on how they can protect themselves and their vehicles.

Auto Guard 2.0 expands on the work of a highly successful operation that led to the arrest of dozens responsible for stealing cars in the Region last year, said Chief MacSween. This work has a direct impact on community safety. In fact, York Region has seen a decline in auto thefts so far in 2024 roughly 33 per cent from this time last year.

The numbers are still troubling. There is still work to be done. This is a result of efforts of YRP's Investigative Unit and frontline members of our policing partners in the greater Toronto area and our strategic partnerships with Canada Border Service Agency, the Port Authority of Montreal, CN Rail, the Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railway, as well as many others. Over the past year, we have launched multiple operations, including Auto Guard, using a three-pronged approach in crime prevention, detention and apprehension. However, we do understand that we'll need an ongoing continued effort to stem the tide of organized crime and violent crime in our community.

We have a lot of affluent areas in York Region, MacSween concluded. They have nice vehicles, high-end vehicles [and] what we're doing is trying to deal with it from an education standpoint. We know we can't enforce our way out of this problem. That's not going to be the solution, but we have to make sure we have dedicated resources in place to hold those to account when it does occur, and we're doing that. There's an education component and a prevention component and that's where the community comes in to help us because it's a shared responsibility. If you can park your car in the garage, park your car in the garage. Be aware of your surroundings? If you think your vehicle is potentially a targeted vehicle, keep your doors locked. Don't put yourself in a position to be a victim, but people can only do so much.

By Brock Weir