



Rural Crime Watch – January 2020



Monthly Newsletter to Members of Cochrane Foothills Protective Association

VILLAGE RESIDENTS USE INNOVATIONS TO THWART THIEVES

At 4:30 am on May 3, a truck pulled into a prairie village. It stopped in an area away from the street lights. A village resident heard a sound, looked out and saw the unknown vehicle. Three occupants emerged and started walking slowly in several directions. She immediately called a nearby neighbour and asked them to also watch and contact others. The resident then quietly went to the vehicle, peaked in and removed the keys. Meanwhile the neighbour called the police and other neighbours. In 15 minutes, most of the community turned on their outside lights. Many started driving around in trucks, cars and quads looking for the probable prowlers. One resident had a drone with a night camera. Another had a plane. The police came and joined the search. The prowlers were not in the village. No vehicles were stolen to make a getaway. The village was located in a very flat area and the spring thaw had left fields so wet that four wheel drives could not travel.



A few hours later, three youth suspects were located in a very marshy area. A local farmer transported the officers in the bucket of the tractor to the suspects. And back to the village with suspects also in the bucket. It appeared they were relieved to be found and rescued from very soggy and cold terrain. They were arrested and charged with offences of theft, possession of stolen property and breach of probation.



This story started earlier. The suspects were from a nearby urban area where they would party, steal a vehicle, drive to a rural area where keys were often in trucks, and choose a truck with a quad cab for comfort. Then they would drive to a village to prowl and pilfer items of value to sell. They would return home with the booty and ditch the truck. This was to be another adventure with probable opportunities.

The community had been experiencing random thefts at night. Only a few weeks earlier, the community met and decided to be proactive. The main steps were to get to know others and to feel comfortable enough to alert anyone at any time. They also set-up a contact list of names and phone numbers - organized in a phone fan-out with primary and secondary contacts. The explicit understanding was to pay attention to the fan-out and diligently alert others.

The RCMP was aware that small communities are sometimes the target of thefts. Typically a group comes at night with one or two vehicles, prowlers walk along streets and lanes checking for unlocked doors. Items stolen are often vehicles, items in vehicles and from unlocked buildings. Communities are encouraged to watch for suspicious activity, and report promptly to police and neighbours. In this case the removal of the keys was a

significant break in the chain of the suspects' actions. Police cautioned that any such interrupting action maintain safety first. At night and even in daylight, the risks from intruders are very hard to gauge. Of key concern is the variety of weapons and personalities. Police were delighted the alert went to most of the community, and the turning on of lights and searching disrupted the culprits. A bonus was the availability of surveillance modes such as the plane and drone - to add to the eyes and ears of everyone engaged. Police also noted that as the search continued, no resident approached the suspects; police were frequently updated of any sightings of the suspects.

From a rural crime prevention perspective, the residents were aware and concerned, considered resources they had, formed a simple plan and carried it out. Actions were common sense and minimized risk. This story is a composite of several incidents from which to encourage custom community surveillance.

RURAL EMERGENCY ALERTS

Each rural community develops its own means of alerting neighbours of a threat such as fire, flood or intruders.



More than a century ago, the continuous ringing of church bell or the continuous whistle of a steam engine would signal "Pay attention. Help needed. Come to muster point". Into the last half of 20th century, party line phones provided a means to alert all on the same line by an unusual or long ring. Today most people carry a smart phone with features to provide broad distribution of an alert message. The key is a system known to all. Consider using more of the phone features in a

proactive community support group to quickly alert others. Have all names in the phone contact list and then assemble contact groups to easily send texts and photos. Share phone techniques so all in your group are competent to participate. Make alert messages brief, accurate and prompt. When using the camera, experiment with magnification, flash, focus, etc. Use two quick clicks on the home button to turn on the camera at any time. Use the compass or maps to identify locations not familiar to you. Minimize personal information of others on your phone. Use the lock feature to minimize access to others if you lose the phone. Adopt alert protocols that are most accessible and effective for your group. The vigilance and alerts of everyone helps deter crime for you and the whole community.

RCW PARTICIPATION

Check out the news and links on our website <https://cfparcw.ca/>. Invite your neighbours to also become part of our community crime prevention movement to send a message to would-be intruders. "Beware. These rural people are informed, prepared and connected to deter crime."



INVITATION TO MEMBERS

If you have any information, comments or questions to share in the next newsletter, please submit to the general CFPA email address info@cfparcw.ca. We are Rural Crime Watch, a network of concerned residents, committed to making a safer community through basic crime prevention principles. Our security is greatly enhanced when we work together as good neighbours.

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