



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Criminal Intelligence Section
National Weapons Enforcement Support Team

Date: 2005-12-20
To: Inspector Rob ROTHWELL, Inspector i/c Criminal Intelligence Section
From: D/Constable 1759 Martin BRUCE - N WEST (Vancouver)
Subject: Proposed Vancouver Police Department Firearms Amnesty

A prevention strategy for safer homes and a safer community.

Having read news reports of recent firearms amnesties, conducted by the Province of Manitoba and the Toronto Police Service, my inquiries revealed that the Vancouver Police Department had last conducted an amnesty in 1998.

On 2005-12-01 I suggested that the Vancouver Police Department should consider another amnesty following a rise in firearms related incidents in the city. As you are aware DCC CHALMERS thought the proposal had merit for further examination. Consequently I have researched the Manitoba and Toronto firearms amnesty programs and also reviewed our 1997 experience. The following facts were ascertained:

Province of Manitoba

The Province of Manitoba conducted a firearms amnesty from 2005-06-01 to 2005-06-30, the first program to held in that province for ten years. For safety reasons firearms were collected by police from residents as opposed to them bringing weapons into police stations.

Just over \$19,500 was spent on advertising. By the end of the amnesty period 211 rifles, 66 shotguns, 36 handguns, 1480 rounds of ammunition and 39 boxes of assorted ammunition had been surrendered.

The Manitoba Justice Minister stated that he didn't expect criminal gangs to turn in their weapons. Ballistic weapons tests later proved that none of the weapons surrendered had been used in a crime.

No incentives were offered to the public in exchange for firearms. The program extended throughout the entire province.

Toronto Police Service

The T.P.S ran a firearms amnesty from 2005-11-07 to 2005-11-30. Prior to, and during the amnesty, a broad public awareness campaign was developed through funding by the Provincial Government in Ontario. The advertising involved television, radio newspapers, posters and billboards. The media was encouraged to offer free advertising in support of the initiative. The campaign was also publicly backed by the Chief Constable, the Province's Attorney General and other Government Ministers.

A telephone hotline was established for the public to call to make arrangements for the pick up of relinquished firearms.

During the amnesty period 261 assorted firearms and over 1,500 rounds of ammunition were surrendered. These included 16 revolvers, 66 shotguns, 132 rifles, 16 pellet guns and 14 replicas.

Previously the T.P.S had offered free event tickets in exchange for surrendered firearms. No such incentive was offered on this occasion. The program, although provincially funded, was only in effect in the City of Toronto.

Vancouver Police Department

I could not locate any official documentation regarding the conduct of the last VPD firearms amnesties which were conducted in 1992, 1997 and 1998. Historical RMS data shows that a total of 75 police reports were generated during those periods.

As an incentive VPD previously offered art prints, donated by Canadian artists, in exchange for surrendered firearms. The 1997 program saw 2,800 firearms and 118,000 rounds of ammunition being turned in to police.

During these amnesties members of the public were asked to call police to arrange the pick up of unwanted firearms. This was considered the safest method of collection, as opposed to individuals bringing the weapons to police facilities themselves.

There were unusually high quantities of firearms and ammunition surrendered in 1997. I believe that this was mainly attributable to the establishment of the Canada Firearms Registry and the requirement, at that time, to register shotguns and rifles and re-register handguns. Many people at the time simply did not want to go through the licencing process.

While it is impossible to predict the exact numbers of firearms and ammunition that would be surrendered during the proposed initiative, a reasonable estimate would be 200 firearms and replicas and around 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

I believe that extensive advertising to ensure public awareness will be a key factor in the programs success.

The exercising of police discretion.

The possession of an unregistered firearm is an offence contrary to section 91 of the Criminal Code. During the proposed firearms amnesty the Vancouver Police Department would be exercising discretion in not recommending that charge against persons surrendering unregistered firearmss.

Documentation and reporting.

13(1)

*PR
ASSIST
FORM*

13(1)

Follow-up to be conducted on surrendered firearms.

13(1)

13(1)

13(1)

13(1)

Political reaction to the proposed VPD initiative:

Following a media release indicating that the Department was considering a firearms amnesty the following favourable comments, were noted on 2005-12-08, in the Vancouver Province newspaper:

"I think any mechanism to get a whole bunch of illegal guns off the streets is a good idea."

BC Solicitor General John Les.

"I personally support that approach."

Federal Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South).

"I think that any initiative that takes guns off the street is a good initiative."

MP Libby Davies (Vancouver East).

Potential benefits.

I believe that offering a firearms amnesty program has a variety of potential benefits, these include:

1. The reduction of the number of firearms in our community, Enhancement of public and officer safety, through the reduction of firearms in our community.
2. Reassurance to the community that the VPD is taking initiative in combating gun violence.
3. The opportunity for a VPD partnership with the Provincial Government.
4. Positive media exposure.

Based on the information at hand I respectfully recommend that:

1. The Vancouver Police Department offer a firearms amnesty between 2005-03-01 to 2005-03-31.
2. That the Vancouver Police Department agrees to exercise force wide discretion by not recommending charges of unauthorized possession of a firearm (Section 91 of the Criminal Code) during the period of the amnesty. Provided police encounter the possessor and the firearm in circumstances consistent with the spirit of the amnesty.
3. The departmental non emergency telephone number (604 717 3321), be identified for the public to call to arrange the pick up of firearms or ammunition. Consideration will be given, in the operational plan, to the additional staffing and training that will be required for operators to deal with amnesty related calls from the public, and for the dispatching of such requests.
4. No gifts or incentives will be offered by the VPD in exchange for the surrender of firearms or ammunition.
5. Funding should be sought from the Provincial Government, citing the Ontario model. Especially with regards to adequately advertizing this public safety initiative.
6. VPD Public Affairs & Marketing be tasked with developing a marketing plan.
7. Senior VPD managers, the Province's Solicitor General, local MP's and MLA's be encouraged to publicly support the initiative in the media, prior to and during it.

I have scheduled the submission of a detailed operational plan, to you, on or before 2006-01-10. At that time additional resourcing for this project will be requested.

Martin Bruce
D/Constable 1759
NWEST – Vancouver.