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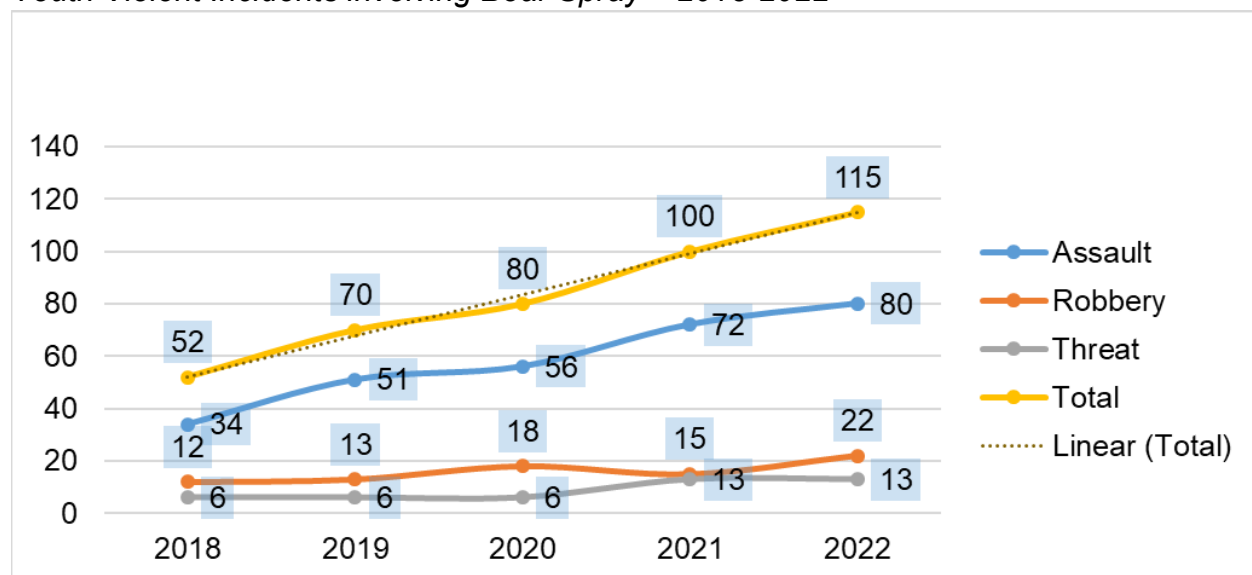
## Background

In 2021, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Youth Investigation Unit (YIU) launched two projects (Menace and Mayhem) aimed at addressing violent behavior among youth. During these projects, the VPD observed a troubling rise in the use of oleoresin capsicum products, commonly known as bear spray, among youth. The projects targeted specific youth groups with the goal of reducing the number of violent incidents. Despite the short term success of these projects in identifying and charging specific individuals, the overall number of youth-related incidents involving bear spray continued to increase. In response to this growing concern, YIU began exploring the possibility of implementing a bylaw to regulate the sale of bear spray within Vancouver.

## Research and Analysis

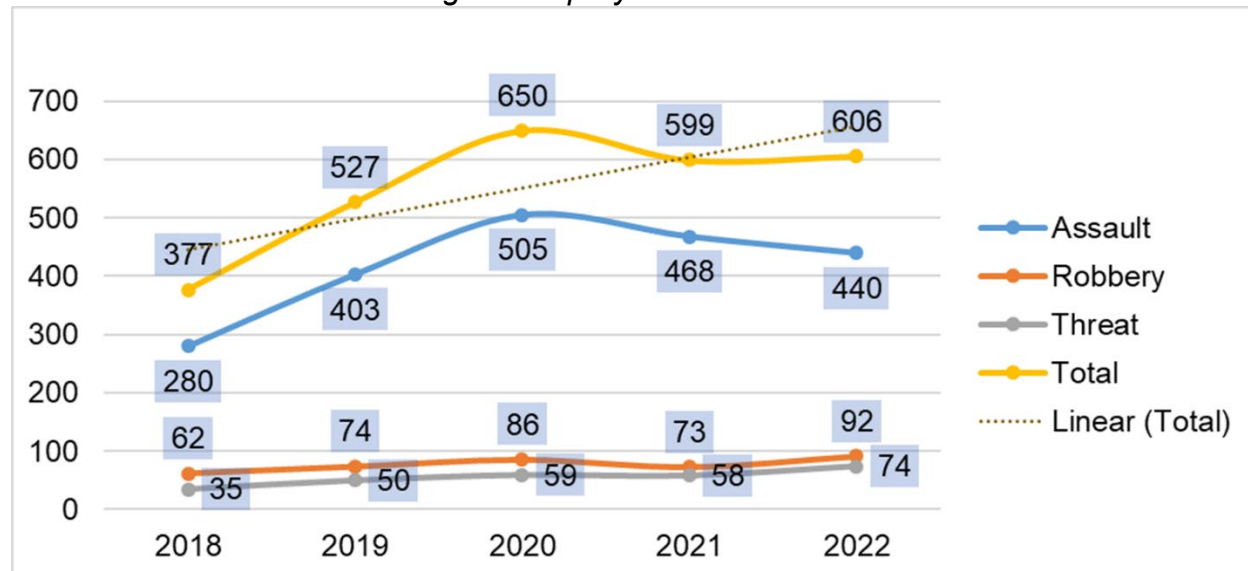
YIU conducted research on the prevalence of bear spray and discovered a significant rise in incidents involving bear spray in the city of Vancouver (CoV) between 2018 and 2022. Bear spray statistics were reviewed to underscore the need for a bylaw, revealing that violence involving bear spray has been an escalating issue amongst both adults and youth. When examining all violent incidents involving bear spray, total numbers increased by 68% from 2018 to 2022 when considering both youth and adults. Specifically, violent incidents involving youth saw an increase of 121%, with reported cases escalating from 52 incidents in 2018 to 115 incidents in 2022.

*Youth Violent Incidents involving Bear Spray – 2018-2022*



The number of adult-related incidents involving bear spray also increased during the same period. Specifically, violent incidents involving adults rose by 61% between 2018 and 2022, from 377 incidents in 2018 to 606 incidents in 2022.

*Adult Violent Incidents involving Bear Spray – 2018-2022*



In examining the presence of bear spray bylaws in nearby municipalities, YIU discovered that Surrey has an established bear spray bylaw from 1996, while Chilliwack was in the final stages of passing a new bylaw. An analysis compared bear spray statistics for Surrey and Vancouver, showing that between 2017 and 2021, Vancouver experienced twice as many incidents as Surrey. It should be noted that throughout this document, all statistics referenced are city-wide, with data compiled using both VPD and Metro Vancouver Transit Police records.

Consultations were undertaken with Planning and Research and Audit Section, Criminal Intelligence Unit, Property Office, and District NPTs. External consultations included discussions with two departments within Health Canada and Vancouver Fire. Statistics and information were provided to CoV staff, and further research was requested to identify the responsible agency for bear spray regulation in British Columbia (BC). Consultations with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, as well as BC Conservation Officers, revealed that no agency in Canada or BC had enforcement authority over bear spray.

Although project progress hit obstacles during the election-year cycle and the pandemic, by 2022 it was clear that the statistics continued to reflect an increase in bear spray incidents. In October 2022 CoV staff advised they would proceed with moving the bylaw forward.

## **Vancouver City Council ('Council') Approval**

The report to Council was reviewed and approved by the VPD Executive. Superintendent Tran and then-YIU Detective Craig Reynolds (now Sergeant) attended the CoV Council meeting to address questions regarding the regulation and report. As a result of these efforts, the bylaw was unanimously passed on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

## **Education and Enforcement**

Upon approval of the new bylaw, a two-stage approach was implemented. The first stage focused on education and information gathering. Information was collected about stores selling bear spray that were not identified in the CoV report. The Business Liaison Unit (BLU) engaged with these stores to inform them about the new bylaw. In April 2023, the CoV distributed an information sheet outlining the new regulations to approximately 1,425 businesses. BLU had contacted over 60 stores to provide education on the bylaw, discovering that many businesses were unaware of the new regulations, with 20% of these businesses found to be non-compliant. Warnings were issued, and further education and guidance was provided.

For the second stage, Project MACE was created utilizing members from YIU, Community Policing Services Unit, and five different VPD units, along with city bylaw inspectors. Phase 1 of Project MACE, conducted between October 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023, saw VPD undercover operators perform 40 compliance checks across 30 stores. This phase resulted in seven purchases of oleoresin capsicum products and one purchase of a Conductive Energy Weapon (taser), leading to \$14,000 in fines for bear spray violations and \$1,500 for weapons-related offences. Additionally, seven locations reported that they ceased selling bear spray or refused to sell it following VPD's educational outreach.

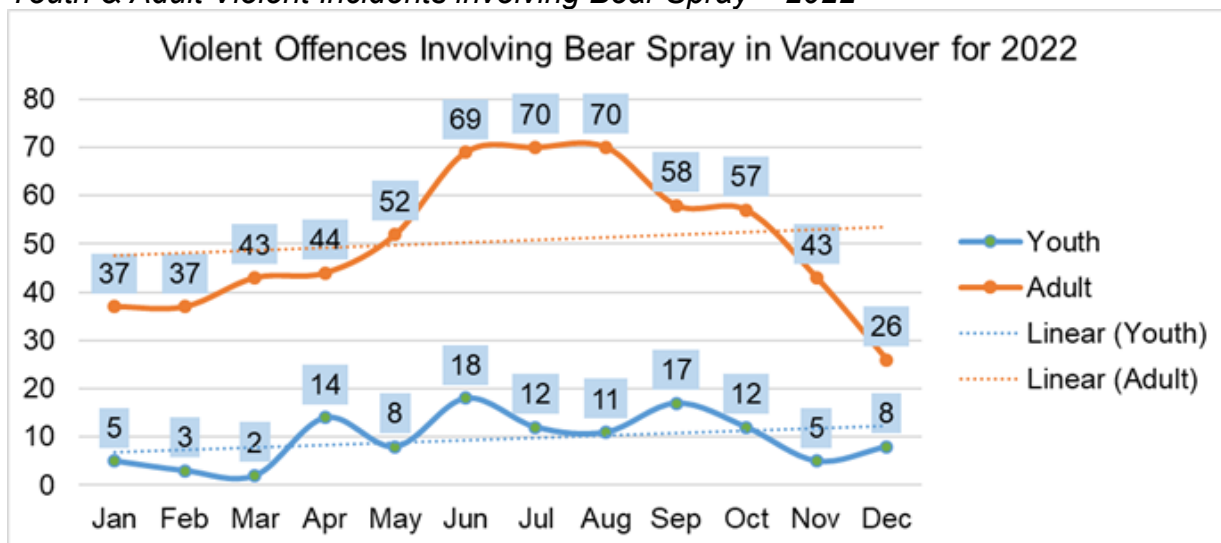
Phase 2 of Project MACE, conducted between December 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, involved compliance checks at 18 locations, including ten from Phase 1 that had not been compliant or were previously sold out. Oleoresin capsicum products were purchased from three new locations, one of which was near an elementary school, resulting in \$3,000 in bear spray-related fines. All stores found non-compliant in Phase 1 were now in compliance, and five locations checked during Phase 2 either refused to sell or had stopped selling bear spray due to the new bylaw.

## Current Statistics

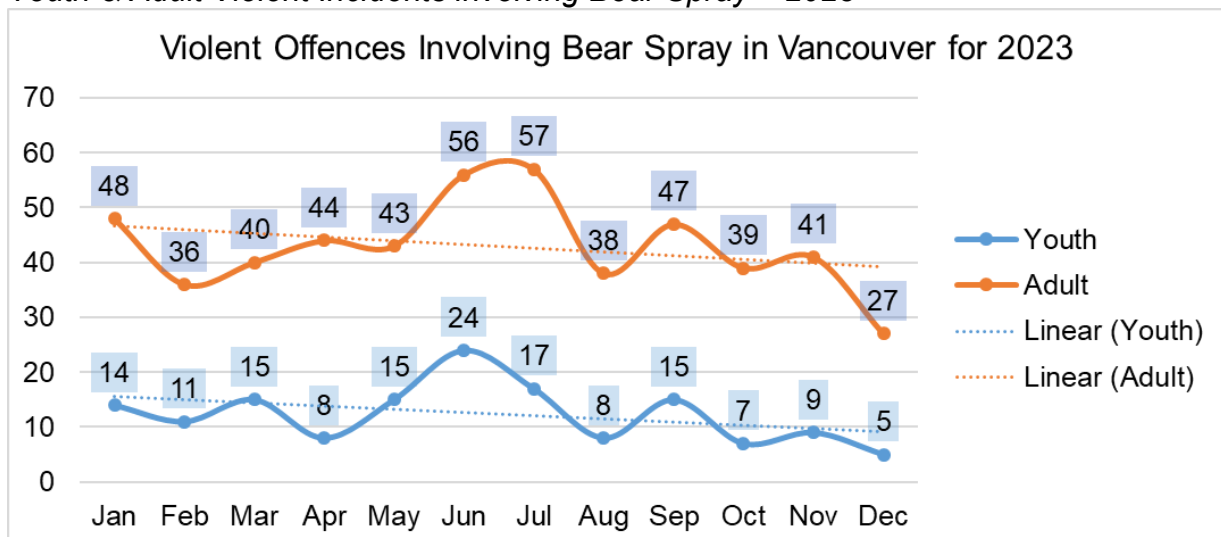
### Impact of Education and Enforcement

Following the implementation of the new bylaw and subsequent educational and enforcement efforts, there was a noticeable decline in violent offences involving bear spray, affecting both youth and adults. From August to December 2023, violent offences involving bear spray and youth, including robbery, threats, and assaults, decreased by 19% for the same period in 2022, dropping from 53 incidents in 2022 to 43 incidents in 2023. For adults, violent offences during this period also saw a reduction, with incidents falling by 24% from 254 in 2022 to 192 in 2023.

*Youth & Adult Violent Incidents involving Bear Spray – 2022*



*Youth & Adult Violent Incidents involving Bear Spray – 2023*



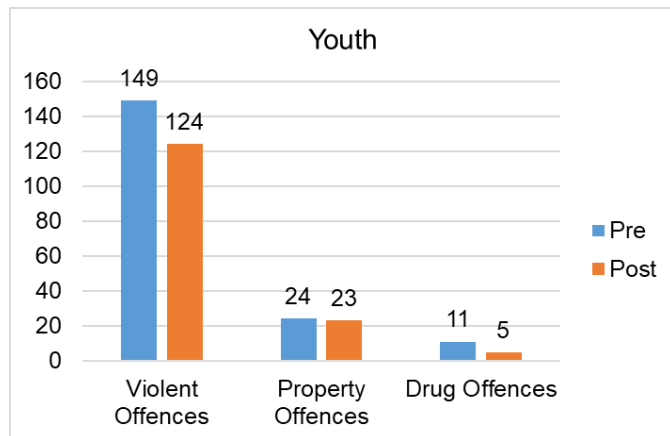
Additional analysis indicated that the decline in incidents began in August, aligning with the completion of the educational outreach to stores. Overall, total youth-related incidents involving oleoresin capsicum products decreased by 12% from August 1 to December 31, 2023, compared to the same period in 2022, with incidents reducing from 78 to 69. This data reflects the positive impact of the bylaw’s implementation, showing a trend towards reduced bear spray-related violence.

**Pre- and Post-Bylaw Implementation**

In examining the significance and impact of bear spray bylaw implementation in Vancouver, pre- and post-implementation data was also examined, with analysis of all bear spray-related incidents during the 365 days preceding and following implementation. In other words, the period between April 11, 2022 and April 11, 2024 was examined, with comparison of findings noted between the types of offences and populations analyzed.

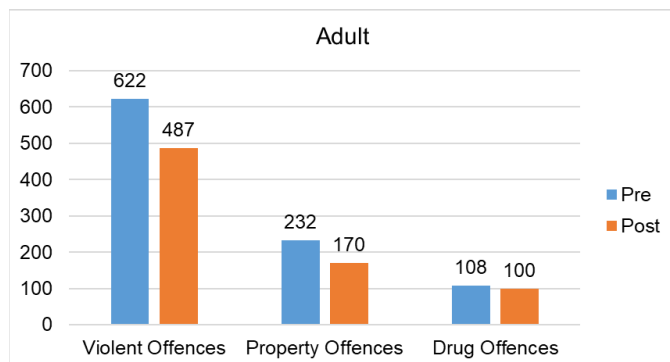
**Youth**

365-day pre- and post-implementation of bylaw data showed a decrease of 17% in violent offences involving bear spray (from 149 to 124 incidents), a decrease of 4% in property offences (from 24 to 23 incidents), and a decrease of 55% in drug offences (from 11 to 5 incidents). The overall decrease for these incidents was 17% (from 184 to 152 incidents).



**Adult**

365-day pre- and post-implementation of bylaw data showed a decrease of 22% in violent offences involving bear spray (from 622 to 487 incidents), a decrease of 27% in property offences (from 232 to 170 incidents), and a decrease of 7% in drug offences (from 108 to 100 incidents). The overall decrease for all these incidents was 21% (from 962 to 757 incidents).



## Year-to-Date Comparison

### All Incidents

In examining the Year-to-Date (YTD) period from January to July, further decreases have been found between 2023 and 2024, as is shown in the following tables and graphs.

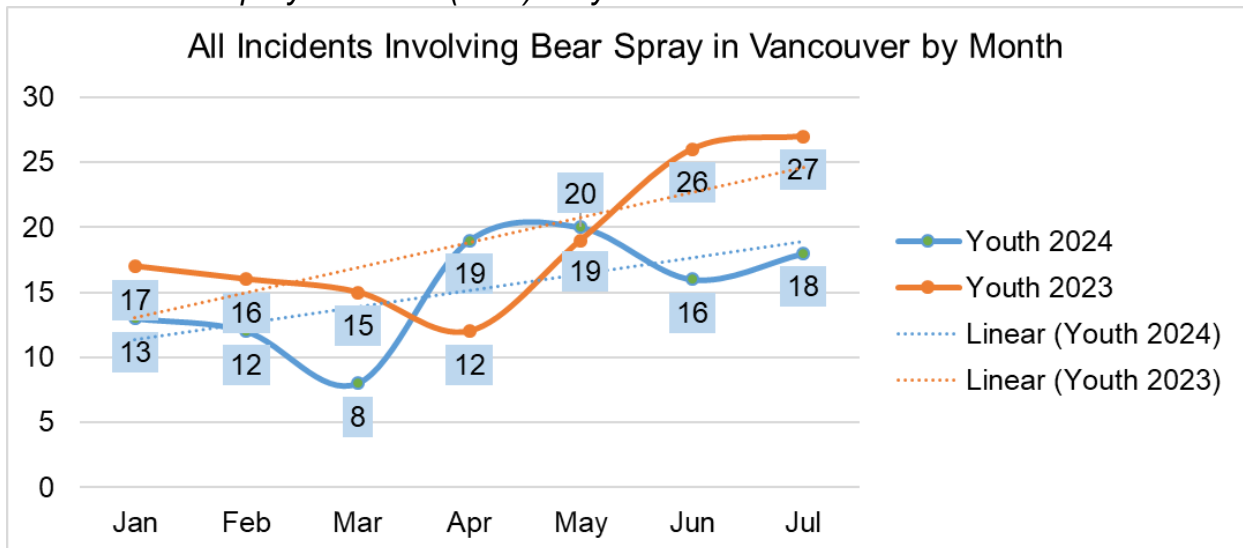
### *All Bear Spray Incidents (YTD)*

All Incidents	2023 Jan to Jul	2024 Jan to Jul	% Change
Youth	132	106	-20%
Adult	511	428	-16%
Total	643	534	-17%

### *Youth Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Offence Type*

Youth	2023 Jan to Jul	2024 Jan to Jul	% Change
Violent Offences	104	52	-50%
Property Offences	19	11	-42%
Drug Offences	1	3	200%
Total	123	66	-46%

### *All Youth Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Month*

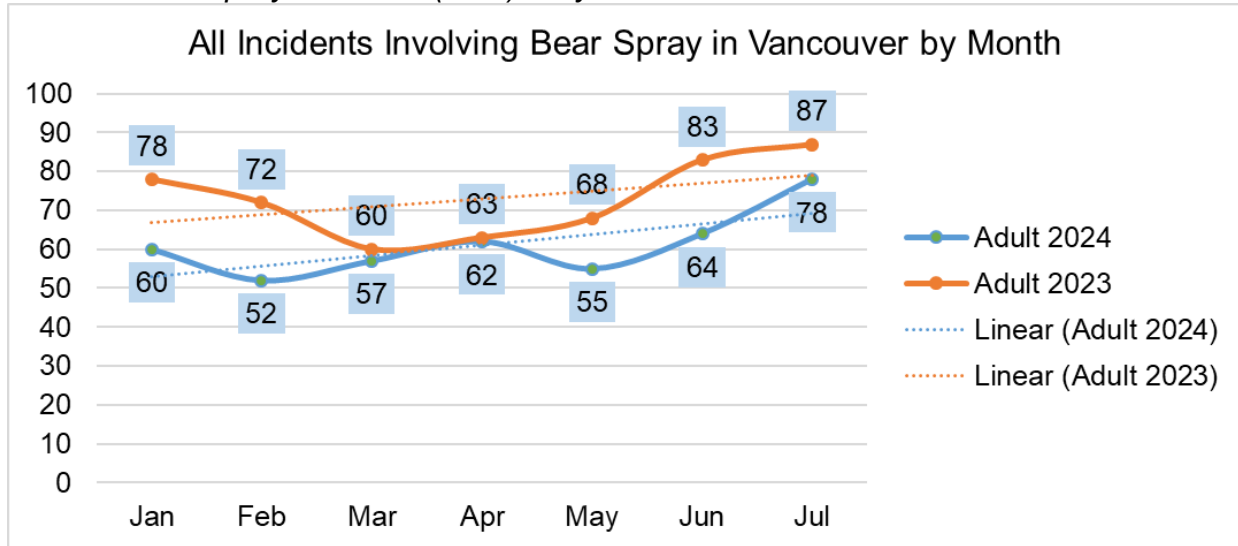


### *Adult Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Offence Type*

Adult	2023 Jan to Jul	2024 Jan to Jul	% Change
Violent Offences	324	246	-24%
Property Offences	113	88	-22%
Drug Offences	64	58	-9%
Total	501	392	-22%



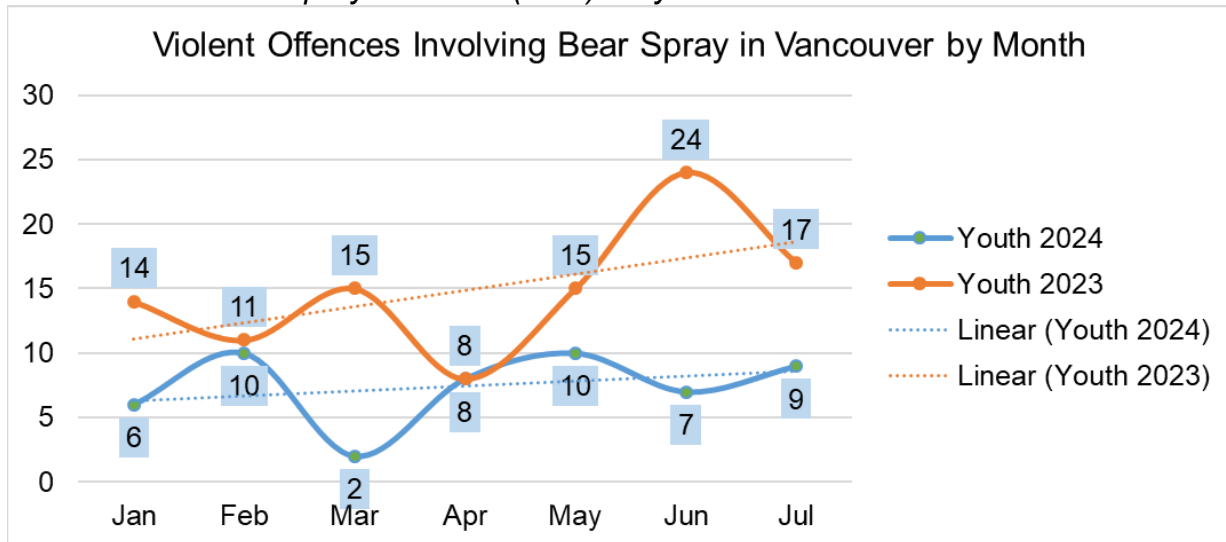
*All Adult Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Month*



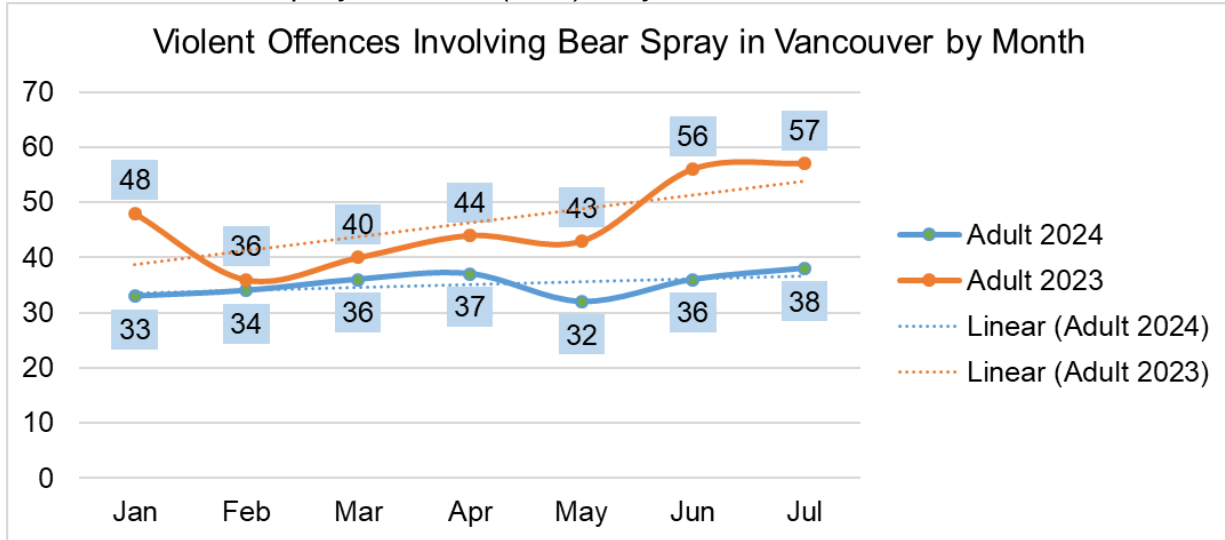
*Violent Incidents*

Although there was an increase of 29% in violent offences involving youth in 2023 compared to 2022 (from 115 to 148 incidents), these incidents continued to trend down in the first seven months in 2024. Compared to the same period in 2023, there has been a decrease of 50% in youth violence involving bear spray and there has been a decrease of 24% in adult violence involving bear spray in 2024.

*Youth Violent Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Month*



### Adult Violent Bear Spray Incidents (YTD) – By Month



## Outside Agencies

YIU identified the necessity for cooperation with outside agencies as youth could still purchase bear spray from other regions. Superintendent Tran presented the new bylaw to the British Columbia Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP), emphasizing the reduction in violent incidents involving bear spray since its implementation. Following this, several agencies contacted the VPD for information and assistance in developing similar bylaws. Edmonton approved its bylaw in July 2024, while West Vancouver's bylaw was approved in April 2024. Burnaby and Kelowna are currently in progress with their bylaws, and once Kelowna's report is completed, efforts will be made to share information with West Kelowna. Additionally, YIU conducts monthly inter-jurisdictional meetings with other police agencies, where members advocate for further bear spray regulations in cities that have yet to implement such bylaws.

## Police Board Resolution

In February 2024, a resolution was authored for review by the Vancouver Police Board, requesting that the BC Association of Police Boards recommend to the Province of British Columbia the implementation of provincial regulations governing the sale and display of bear spray and other oleoresin capsicum products designed for animal deterrence. The resolution is to address the rise in criminal activity associated with bear spray by establishing a consistent provincial approach. Additionally, it aims to prevent youth from purchasing bear spray in cities lacking specific bylaws that regulate its sale.

## **Conclusion**

The bylaw aimed at regulating the sale and use of bear spray has proven effective in significantly reducing bear spray-related violent crimes amongst both youth and adults. Through a combination of educational initiatives and enforcement, many stores have now either complied with the bylaw or ceased the sale of bear spray altogether. Additionally, the success of this measure has prompted other cities to consider or implement similar bylaws, recognizing the need for regulated control to enhance public safety.