

PRIME to link all British Columbia police

by *Elvin Klassen*

British Columbia is implementing Canada's first province-wide, online police information system.

The Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME) will enhance public safety and improve law enforcement across the province by connecting every municipal police department and RCMP detachment. That will allow information about criminals and crimes to be shared within minutes, according to BC Solicitor General Rich Coleman, who says the system is, to his knowledge, the first of its kind in North America.

"PRIME will transform the way police work, making it easier to get up-to-the-minute information on criminals and to track patterns of crime anywhere in the province," says Coleman. "Criminals almost always leave clues at the scene of a crime and the more effectively you can match the details of one crime scene with the details of another, the faster you can catch a criminal."

Until now, B.C.'s police departments have used a variety of different computer and data systems. Victoria Police Chief Paul Battershill says the system, which the government promises to have up and running across the province within a year, is "one of the most important milestones in policing in this province."

"Police work is about collecting and

analyzing information," says Jamie Graham, chair of the B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police and chief of the Vancouver Police Department. "PRIME is a powerful weapon in the fight against crime, allowing police to process information much more effectively. It will also allow police more time for front-line work in the community."

PRIME was tested in Greater Victoria, Port Moody, Richmond and Vancouver and officers raved about its benefits.

Inspector Bob Taylor of the Vancouver Police Department calls the system "perhaps the biggest revolution in the way we do business we've ever experienced."

Instead of sharing notes with adjacent departments or phoning a colleague about possible similarities in cases, officers will now have access to information the moment it's entered on a laptop computer in police cars and in offices. Information about a vehicle, the history of complaints about a residence or the police record of a person stopped for questioning will be available instantly.

Coleman, a former RCMP officer, says PRIME will transform the way police work because it will allow them to track patterns of



Rich Coleman

crime. As an example, he cites a case several years ago when a man was stopped and checked by police. They released him since there were no outstanding warrants, not knowing that he was under court order prohibiting him from being in the area because his ex-wife lived there. She was killed a few hours later.

PRIME, which is projected to cost between \$14 and \$20 million plus annual operating costs of \$200 to \$300 per officer, features one-time data entry. A 911 call taker will enter the initial information, followed by additional information from the

police dispatcher, officers attending the incident and finally, the follow up investigators.

Stolen or lost property can be entered into the system within minutes, using in-car computers, which can also be used to access information on suspects and crimes, reports and mug shots.

"The only people who won't be happy about this system will be the criminals because we're going to catch them quicker," Coleman says.

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