



Vancouver, B.C.—Sgt. Daryl Wiebe shows off the new communication system in police cars that can access mug shots and other records with wireless technology to E-Comm.

(photo: Ian Smith/Vancouver Sun)

Technology helps officers share files on criminals

Gerry Bellet—[The Vancouver Sun](#)

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Three Lower Mainland police forces using a new electronic police records system are providing front-line police officers unheard of advantages in fighting crime, says Vancouver police Sergeant Daryl Wiebe.

Wiebe said the PRIME-BC system operated by E-Comm -- the agency that provides 911 and area-wide radio systems for police and emergency services throughout the GVRD -- has "completely changed the way we do business."

"It's an outstanding system and we can do things now that we could never have done before," said Wiebe, who is the department's training and implementation coordinator for PRIME-B.C.

Vancouver, Port Moody and Richmond RCMP use the system, which cost them a total of \$4.5 million in software and training and \$2 million for new laptops. It lets police departments to share information in a way that was unheard of before, said Wiebe.

It has long been a criticism that police departments don't share information with one another, a shortcoming that works to the advantage of criminals, who don't respect municipal boundaries. In the case of Vancouver, Port Moody and Richmond the boundaries have disappeared and information compiled by one department is available to all.

"Let's say a police officer in Vancouver finds someone prowling lanes late at night. It could be that they were doing the same in Port Moody but until we went on to PRIME-B.C. we would never have known," said Wiebe.

Canadian police officers have been equipped with computers in their patrol cars for a number of years, enabling them to check a suspect on a national registry to see if the person had outstanding charges or a criminal record.

But this would provide only a fraction of the information held by police on some suspects, said Wiebe. He said officers also file routine intelligence reports on persons of interest they have come across that are not part of a file being compiled for the purpose of laying charges. This in-house information could be invaluable when another officer also comes across a suspect and PRIME-B.C. now makes it available. It will also provide details of a suspect's driving record, including any prohibitions.

PRIME-B.C. is endorsed by the B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police and the long-range plan is to make it a province-wide system, said Glen Miller, IT manager for E-Comm. "For it to be totally effective we need all police departments to belong. What we are doing now is a pilot project," said Miller. It would cost other municipalities about \$15 million to extend the program province-wide, said Miller.

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As an example of how the system has improved policing, Wiebe relates an incident that occurred this summer in South Vancouver, when an officer stopped a vehicle being driven late at night by a known burglar.

"We knew of him but we couldn't tie him to any B&Es [break and enters] but in the back of his vehicle was a tool box with another person's name in felt pen. The alert police officer took that name and queried the system and up pops a report that a person with that name had reported a B&E earlier in the morning.

"The officer couldn't see any mention of a tool box being stolen so he phoned the complainant and wakes him up and the guy tells him he did have a tool box stolen but had forgotten to report it. He asked him to identify it, which he did, and now they've got the guy for possession of stolen property.

"I guarantee it could never have happened in the old days when we used paper records," said Wiebe.

Vancouver police have 186 dedicated PRIME-B.C. laptops that are used by the patrol section, dog squad and other specialty units. The Panasonic Toughbook 28s are rugged laptops designed to withstand moisture and dust and being dropped. They are worth about \$5,000 each. Wireless communication is done over a specially encrypted cell phone net for maximum security.

Apart from sharing vital information, the laptops have also changed the way police file reports for minor crimes -- in the past a tedious exercise that took officers off the street for extended periods while they returned to the office.

"Let's say some guys been arrested for smashing a window. The officer will now have the report written up while he's waiting for the paddy wagon to arrive to take the guy away. Before he'd have to wait for the wagon then go back to the station to file his report and he'd be off the road for an hour. There would be times when a third of the [on-duty] officers would be in the office doing their reports," he said.

Another feature of the system is that it automatically files reports to specialized sections. "Before this system if we had a sexual assault overnight we'd write up a report but the only way to make sure the sexual offences squad supervisor saw it first thing in the morning instead of two or three hours later was if we copied it and shoved it under his door - and I've done this myself.

"Now the report is waiting when he comes in and he can assign an officer right away. A difference of four to six hours in such investigations can be very important," said Wiebe.

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