

Richmond RCMP Road Safety Unit

Richmond, British Columbia

Cst Dave PURGHART - recipient



The Richmond RCMP Road Safety Unit is comprised of 15 sworn police officers dedicated to the enforcement of several statutes including the Highway Traffic Act and other related to keeping the roads and highways of City of Richmond, B.C. safe.

The team has evolved from a traditional “traffic Section” to a Road Safety Unit whose emphasis has been on fostering relationships with community agencies in an effort to ensure the roads and highways of Richmond are safe.

For years, the City of Richmond was plagued by railway traffic accidents when vehicles would attempt to cross controlled and uncontrolled intersections, occasionally against the railway control barriers. Although the numbers did not appear to be high on paper, six in the year of 2006, Richmond had the highest collision rate in the Province. These collisions had an enormous financial impact on the CN Rail and the City of Richmond not to mention the potential for loss of human life.

The CN Police, in an effort to engage the public in railway crossing safety commenced a campaign targeting “crossing safely.” It was through this initial public advisory that the Richmond RCMP Road Safety Unit became engaged.

Since then, Cst Purghart a member of the RSU, has been involved in a unique strategy, working with members of the Canadian National Railway Police and the City of Richmond By Law Department. Together they have been targeting the railway crossings in Richmond, issuing traffic violations when observed. Over time, The City of Richmond, the RCMP and CN Police recognized this as a valuable and necessary relationship aimed at reducing injuries and saving lives and at the same time raising awareness within the policing community.

The main goal for the joint operation was to identify the high risk railway crossings and peak times for accidents. Through public advisories put out by the CN and RCM Police and joint ops, the team was committed to ensuring Richmond streets were the safest in the world.

Richmond RCMP Road Safety Unit participated in a Joint Operations with CN Police to target issues of railway crossing safety. 3 separate railway crossings were set up for enforcement. RCMP, CN Police and Richmond By-laws were present. By-law units conducted commercial truck enforcement when police were available to address the crossing and when only By-laws were present, the By-laws officers issued violations for "stopping on the railway tracks" to supplement the police activities.

Once the train was underway, members set up at the crossings along the Shell Rd Railway corridor to conduct enforcement at the activated crossings as the train proceeded southbound. Members present were: 3 RCMP, 4 CN Police, 3 By-laws.

On most occasions the railway crossing enforcement was conducted with stationary operations at railway crossings in Richmond.

Once this was established, the team began "Officer-on-the-train" mobile enforcement. During this method of enforcement, an RSU member is positioned in the cab of the train to broadcast their progress southbound along the Shell Road railway corridor during the trains scheduled route while RSU and CN members set up at crossings to look out for vehicles disobeying the crossing lights and/or barrier arms.

Since 2008, the joint operation has been run approximately every month. As a result the crashes declined to 2 in 2008 and then 0 in 2009.

This joint operation has been met with great enthusiasm from the Regional Inspector for CN Rail Police for the Pacific region. Both the CN Police members and the Richmond Road Safety Unit members approach these operations with eagerness and work well together in a friendly and productive environment. Since its inception, the CN Police members have noted a significant reduction in the number of crashes, close calls, (people running the crossings once the lights are activated) and the number of charges or infractions noted.

This strategic three way partnership was created through necessity, nurtured through joint appreciation for the serious safety concerns on and near the City's railway crossings and all together enhanced by the commitment of all the police and By Law officers involved.

This increased level of cooperation has also resulted in CN Police members participating in Impaired Enforcement Roadblocks during night shifts in Richmond.