

PUBLIC SAFETY

West Van police hope to create camera database with 'Project Vigil'

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Images caught on security cameras are critical in solving crimes, so West Vancouver police are launching a new way of getting them.

Called Project Vigil, the department is collecting a confidential registry of residents' surveillance cameras so officers can contact them to see if their cameras picked up anything involving nearby crimes.

Const. Jeff Palmer said the program, an offshoot of the department's Business Watch Program, doesn't ask anybody to reposition their cameras from their own properties. It just allows residents with security cameras to register information about their systems with police.

"An example might be if there was a break-in at one property and we have reason to believe a suspect fled through neighbouring yards. If we're able to glance at our registry and if (there are) surveillance cameras in these houses down the block, maybe (there might) be an image captured on their surveillance.

"Or if somebody has a camera positioned to cover their driveway, there may be a partial view out to a street. If we know there was an offence, that surveillance may give us an opportunity to grab an image of a suspect vehicle driving away."

Residents registering with Project Vigil are not providing police with direct access to or active monitoring of their camera systems, he noted. Registrants will be contacted only if there is reason to believe a crime happened within view of their cameras.

"We can always burn boot leather and knock on doors, but having the information available in a voluntary registry could help us be more efficient in those circumstances," said Palmer. "And we're not seeking anyone to

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WEST VANCOUVER POLICE

position their cameras for our benefit. They should position their cameras to best secure their own properties."

While police could take ownership of any images to use in court, residents can also opt out of the registry at any time.

Palmer said there were 1,415 property crimes in West Vancouver in 2015, which they hope to reduce by four per cent this year, with Project Vigil one of their tools.

He didn't know how many West Vancouver homes have surveillance cameras, only that the numbers are rising.

Meanwhile, Micheal Vonn, policy director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, said he has no problem with Project Vigil because it is a voluntary registry that just asks residents to put their cameras at the service of officers if an incident arises.

"This allows them a means of contacting the property owner who has a camera," said Vonn. "None of that intrudes on civil liberties concerns."

However, Vonn added that residents with cameras should ensure that their cameras don't intrude into anybody else's personal space. "There have been violation of privacy cases brought civilly on the basis of a neighbour's camera intruding into somebody else's property."

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