



RCMP withheld info on unsolved files

Series is meant to raise profile of Island crimes out of spotlight

More than 100 suspicious deaths, homicides and missing persons cases remain open and unsolved in Vancouver Island. But, in a move criticized by victims' families and others, the RCMP's Island District has refused to identify the cases or provide a public accounting of what's being done to clear the backlog.

More than three months ago, the Times Colonist requested a list of all unsolved homicides and suspicious missing persons cases on the Island to use as part of a series of stories on cold cases. The idea was to raise the profile of crimes that had slipped from the spotlight and perhaps elicit new information from the public. Police have long acknowledged this is one of the most effective ways of getting new leads.

The RCMP, however, said releasing a list of all 114 unsolved files, some of which date back to 1924, would compromise investigations and upset families. "The broad scope of your request would identify all files as unsolved homicides, which may or may not be the case," Const. Darren Lagan of Island District's strategic communications office wrote in a July 31 e-mail.

"The RCMP investigates all suspicious deaths as homicides, until such time as evidence proves otherwise. Given this fact, there may well be incidents contained in the 114 files, which ultimately, are not homicides. The families, and survivors of the deceased in these matters may be negatively impacted by media reports identifying their loved ones as part of 'unsolved homicide' files."

Lagan said the decision to withhold information was made after discussions with the investigators as well as Chief Supt. Rick Betker, commanding officer of the Island District. "The RCMP remains committed to these investigations, and the families involved," Lagan said. "Should this response not meet your satisfaction, you may choose to proceed further in ascertaining your requested information via an access to information request."

The Times Colonist made a second attempt a week later, asking for a list of confirmed homicides that remain unsolved, as well as a separate list of all unsolved missing persons cases without indicating which might involve foul play.

The RCMP has yet to respond. Joanne Young, whose daughter Lisa Marie Young vanished from Nanaimo in 2002, found it "incredible" that the RCMP would refuse an opportunity to publicize cold cases and generate tips. "I just find it unreal that they're not out there to help," she said.

The families are already upset, her husband, Don Young, said. "You don't really get over it anyway," he said. "My opinion would be that most people who are going through this would be happy to see something come up about it."

Ernie Crey, whose sister is among the women who vanished from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside years ago, said the RCMP's tactics remind him of the early police response in that case. Police agencies took months and sometimes years to provide a full accounting of the number of women who had disappeared.

Some women were reported missing to Vancouver police, others to RCMP, and a complete list was never compiled until almost four years into the investigation. "When the police fail to release information about their investigations into the murdered and the missing, they delay the day people with knowledge about each death or disappearance will come forward to disclose potentially vital information," Crey said.

Despite the lack of co-operation from senior RCMP officers, many detachment commanders, municipal police forces, retired police officers, and front-line investigators have been more helpful. The Times Colonist was able to compile a partial list of unsolved cases by calling detachments across the Island, speaking to ex-cops, and pulling old newspaper clippings.

The paper will highlight some of those cases in the coming days, and post them to a new Cold Cases website at www.timescolonist.com. Most of the cases to be featured are files still held by Island detachments. However, RCMP headquarters placed a ban on detachment commanders from speaking to the media about the cases, referring questions to the E Division communications sections or to the Island District Major Crime Unit — an integrated unit of Mounties and Victoria police officers.

The RCMP's unsolved homicide unit in Vancouver also refused interview requests. Late last week, the RCMP finally lifted the ban, but by then, a number of detachment commanders were unavailable for comment or didn't have time to review the files. The decision to withhold a comprehensive list of unsolved cases and thwart interviews represents a departure for the RCMP. In the past, the Vancouver major crime section provided the media with lists of unsolved homicides, all of which are reported to the Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS), a computer system for spotting possible serial killers and rapists.

In some cases, the force provided ViCLAS printouts of cases broken down by occupation of the victim. The RCMP's national website also highlights a number of B.C.'s unsolved cases. But it's unclear why some cases are featured and not others. The policy also runs contrary to what happens in other jurisdictions. In the Washington state communities of Spokane and Everett, for instance, newspapers recently worked with police to highlight cold cases in hopes of generating leads.

If you have information that might help solve some of these cases, you can reach Lindsay Kines at 250-381-7890 or lkines@tc.canwest.com and Rob Shaw at 250-380-5350 or rshaw@te.canwest.com

Killing shattered family, A3

New tests solve old cases, A3



ROB SHAW



LINDSAY KINES

Over a week ago, Times Colonist reported that Vancouver Island's RCMP refused to identify the cases or provide a public accounting of what's being done to clear the backlog.

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Times Colonist (Rob Shaw) - Monday September 22, 2008

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"Should this response not meet your satisfaction, you may choose to proceed further in ascertaining your requested information via an access to information request." The Times Colonist made a second attempt a week later, asking for a list of confirmed homicides that remain unsolved, as well as a separate list of all unsolved missing persons cases without indicating which might involve foul play. The RCMP has yet to respond. Joanne Young, whose daughter Lisa Marie Young vanished from Nanaimo in 2002, found it "incredible" that the RCMP would refuse an opportunity to publicize cold cases and generate tips. "I just find it unreal that they're not out there to help," she said. The families are already upset, her husband, Don Young, said. "You don't really get over it anyway," he said. "My opinion would be that most people who are going through this would be happy to see something come up about it." 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