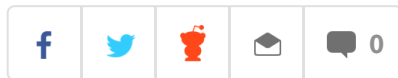


STRAIGHT TALK »

With 29 anti-Asian cases under investigation, Vancouver police boost efforts to tackle COVID-19 racism

by Craig Takeuchi on May 22nd, 2020 at 3:40 PM



Numerous reports have been arising over the past few months about verbal and physical anti-Asian attacks against individuals and acts of vandalism against Asian-related properties in Vancouver.

Among them have been racist graffiti on the Chinese Cultural Centre and lion sculptures at the Millennium Gate in Chinatown, two suspects threatening an Asian woman and her mother (one of whom later apologized), a male suspect assaulting a woman who defended two female Asian bus passengers from his racist criticism, a male suspect yelling racist comments about COVID-19 at a 92-year-old Chinese man with dementia while throwing him out of a store, and a First Nations woman who was allegedly punched for sneezing after she was mistaken to be Asian.

The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) held a news conference today (May 22) to address these issues and to provide an update on what is done.

Operations Deputy Chief Const. Howard Chow expressed his concerns about the troubling rise in the numbers of hate-related cases this year compared to 2019.

Chow stated that police have had 77 hate-associated cases so far this year, compared to 51 in the same time period last year. He also pointed out that there are 29 anti-Asian files currently under investigation this year compared to only four in the same time period last year.

In addition, he said that 10 active files from April and May that are being investigated that could be classified as hate-related files at a later date in the near future.

“A lot of these files, they start off innocuous enough and people will report them, thinking it’s nothing, but the more we dig into it, then it turns out there’s a hate-crime element to it,” Chow explained.

He said that the victims in all of these cases have been people of Asian descent and that investigators believe that the offenders were attempting to specifically target people of East Asian descent.

“We work with our partners at E-Comm to ensure all calls that come in with bias- or prejudice-type overtones are assigned and investigated, even though they may not be criminal in nature,” Chow explained.



Vancouver investigators released these images of a male suspect after the Chinese Cultural Centre was vandalized with racist graffiti on April 2.

 VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

Investigations Deputy Chief Const. Laurence Rankin explained that in determining a hate crime, investigators will take several factors into consideration, including comments made during the offence, such as racial slurs or remarks about COVID-19.

“We don’t need a direct physical assault for investigators to initiate an investigation as a potential hate crime,” he said.

He stated that 19 cases, which include racial slurs, vandalism, and assaults, were assigned to investigators within his division.

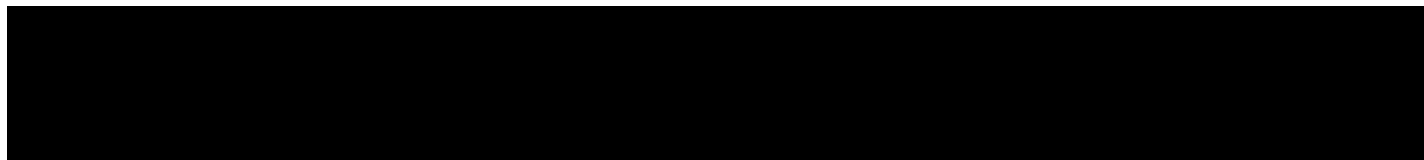
Ten of those files have since concluded, he said, as “there is no suspect or evidence that will lead to the identification of a suspect”. However, these cases could be reactivated in the future if further evidence surfaces.

He said that suspects have been identified in six investigations that are nearing completion.

Although suspects have been arrested and released, no formal charges have been laid yet as the investigations remain ongoing.

He added that the public can “sometimes have unrealistic expectations of how investigations unfold based on how they are portrayed on television and in the movies” and explained that criminal investigations are a “time-consuming process” to ensure successful outcomes of the investigation.

For instance, even if they have an identified suspect in a photo, he said, investigators still need to build a case beyond surveillance videos and stills. He said that investigators spend “significant time” on witness and video canvassing, collecting victim and witness statements, collection and analysis of forensic evidence (including fingerprints, DNA, and video), and more.





Investigators have identified this suspect, who threw a 92-year-old Chinese man out of an East Vancouver convenience store while yelling racist comments about COVID-19 at him on March 13.

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While Chow is calling on the public to speak out and stand up when witnessing hate crimes, he clarified that he is not asking people to take any actions that may bring harm to themselves but to instead call 911 to report what is happening.

Rankin echoed this sentiment, as he does not want people to put themselves in jeopardy as that may increase the number of victims involved.

He advised witnesses to remain at a safe distance while paying attention to details. If the suspect is on foot, he recommended noting information about the suspect's appearance, clothing, and direction of travel. If a vehicle is involved, he recommended obtaining the license plate, a description of vehicle, and the direction of travel.

Other recommendations he gave included trying to discourage the suspect from proceeding or trying to get other individuals to come to the location.

Meanwhile, Chow also said that VPD has been ramping up measures to address these issues, including educating Chinese communities about what constitutes a hate crime, the development of a pamphlet in Chinese to explain how people can connect with police, and increasing foot patrols and community safety officer presence in the Chinatown area. (The *Georgia Straight* inquired about specific numbers but unfortunately they were unavailable.)

In addition, 24-hour public safety cameras have been placed in Chinatown and two other areas of the city.

Chow said the VPD is trying to reduce any barriers that citizens may face in reporting incidents. For instance, the VPD is developing a new system that will enable victims to report non-emergency incidents in Chinese.

Rankin also said that their hate-crime investigator monitors local, national, and international situations or events that could lead to increases in hate crimes in Vancouver.

Chow, who said he is disturbed by these developments as a Vancouver-born person of Chinese descent, said he had been on conference call with chiefs from across the U.S. about this issue which has been taking place in numerous cities across North America.

He added that although today's news conference was focused on Chinese Canadian communities, one of their concerns is how hate can spread and affect numerous others.

"With hate crime, we can fast forward six months down the road and it will be another community," he said, "and that's why it's so important that we get behind this and get behind the communities."

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