

Citizens on Patrol Program

Helping keep communities safe for 25 years

Manitoba Public Insurance

For more than 25 years, Manitoba Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP) has been helping municipalities and their residents be proactive about community safety, both among their properties and on the road, in more than 50 regional groups throughout the province.

The community-based program continues to be instrumental in preventing crime and assisting local police agencies. COPP members are also an integral part of efforts to raise awareness of road safety risks and keep Manitobans safe.

With three main goals: deterrence, education and awareness, Manitoba COPP aims to mobilize citizens to get involved in the neighbourhoods they know best – their own.

As both the COPP group coordinator for the West St. Paul, Man. group and a councillor for the rural municipality, **Detlef Hindemith** has seen the tremendous impact engaged citizens can have.

“Law enforcement has a limited amount of resources and we all know it’s never enough, despite the great work they do. Having a COPP program in your community assists everyone by having members act as additional eyes and ears through reporting crime or suspicious activities to police or the RCMP,” Hindemith said. “Establishing a COPP group in your community is one of the best decisions you can make.”

History of COPP

Founded in 1991 by Manitoba Justice, Manitoba COPP was created to foster partnerships with communities to encourage citizens to contribute to



Detlef Hindemith, West St. Paul COPP group coordinator (right), presenting Const. Bryan O'Rourke, RCMP liaison for the West St. Paul COPP group with a 2015 Appreciation Award at the annual provincial conference in October. Photo courtesy of MPI.

making their roads and neighbourhoods safer. The next year, the department began offering one-time grants to cover the cost of basic equipment like portable radios, cell phones, flashlights and vest and jackets.

After a decade of success and growth, Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) partnered with Manitoba Justice in 2001 to help provide support and coordination of the program under Manitoba COPP, creating a more connected network for the existing groups to share techniques and improve local programs.

In addition to patrolling their communities, COPP groups also play an important role in promoting road safety. This may include operating display speed-reader boards (provided by Manitoba Public Insurance), assisting with school safety patrol programs, identifying suspected impaired drivers on the road and conducting seatbelt and cell phone use surveys in conjunction with the RCMP. In doing so, COPP groups are enhancing the value they bring to their communities by helping to keep their roadways and their neighbourhoods safe.

Province-wide success stories

From Flin Flon to Winkler, from Beausejour to Souris, groups around the province have similar success stories to share.

Neepawa's COPP team, coordinated for the past six years by retired military police officer **Clint Mckechnie**, conducts regular building security checks throughout the town.

“I think the biggest benefit to the community is that they are happy with us and they trust us to be there looking out for them and their property.”

Clint Mckechnie, Group Coordinator, Neepawa COPP

"During this patrol, teams check businesses for unlocked doors or open windows. If something is found, the patrol immediately notifies the RCMP, who will contact the business owner and have them attend the scene to check and properly secure their business facility," McKechnie said. "I think the biggest benefit to the community is that they are happy with us and they trust us to be there looking out for them and their property."

COPP's law enforcement partners echo these benefits in all corners of the province.

"The program really speaks for itself and is likely the reason it has grown and is recognized throughout Canada," said Const. **Bryan O'Rourke**, East St. Paul RCMP, who was first introduced to COPP in Okotoks, Alta. four years ago.

As the RCMP liaison for the West St. Paul group, not only has he seen the positive outcomes of sharing information about suspicious activity, but the outreach members do to their neighbours on several important issues.

"From collecting traffic statistics on cell phone and seat belt use to running a safety exhibition to providing safety tips for children out trick-or-treating on Halloween, handing out reflective bags and doing patrols that night – I know the COPP program provides several benefits," O'Rourke added. "They are also on the lookout for impaired drivers. Any impaired driver taken off the road has a hugely positive impact on anyone else using the highways in that community."

Starting a group

Active and engaged community members are the key component to the COPP concept.

If residents have been interested in getting involved or are concerned about a specific safety issue, encouragement from a municipal leader to start a group is an effective way to boost morale and add to community safety efforts.

The first step is having residents reach out to MPI's **Tracy Douglass**, who is the Manitoba COPP coordinator, or their local law enforcement office. From either person, they will receive information on gaining approval from the relevant law enforcement agency in their area and establishing an executive committee.

Manitoba COPP also provides in-person volunteer training for the group as well as all of the necessary basic equipment free of charge to all groups.



With three main goals, deterrence, education and awareness, Manitoba COPP aims to mobilize citizens to get involved in a community-based crime prevention initiative. *Photo courtesy of MPI.*

From there, each group can set a schedule and lead activities that best fit the needs of their community. For some that might mean nightly patrols and for others it might be speed reader boards and observational surveys of cell phone and seatbelt usage.

Douglass and a regional representative, who is also a COPP volunteer, will be there every step of the way to get the group established with the tools it needs to gain volunteers and understand its options for programming and growth.



Active and engaged community members are the key component to the COPP concept.
Photo courtesy of MPI.

"My primary role is to provide ongoing support to every COPP group in the province," Douglass explained. "Whether they are just getting started or have been established for years, I'm here to help connect groups through networking opportunities, like at our annual conference, contribute programming, fundraising and recruitment ideas as well as supply relevant

safety information for members to distribute within their specific communities."

How municipalities can help

One of the most important components of a successful local COPP group is the support of its municipality. Promoting COPP to community leaders and others who have demonstrated an interest in the program can

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*Const. Bryan O'Rourke,
RCMP Liaison, West St. Paul COPP*

do a great deal to enhance the safety and well being of your community.

For more on how your municipality can get involved in your local COPP group or help start one in your area, visit www.citizensonpatrol.mb.ca or contact the COPP provincial coordinator toll-free at 1-866-326-7792. 📌