

SPEAKING NOTES
HONOURABLE MAYNARD SONNTAG
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND RESOURCES
MINISTER OF FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS RELATIONS

RELEASE OF 2006 CRIME STATISTICS

Good morning.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics released its annual report on crime statistics for the year 2006 earlier today and I am here to respond on behalf of the province.

These statistics are important because they provide us with important information about the overall picture of offending and victimization in our province – we use this information to develop the direction of our policies and programs.

For the third consecutive year there has been a decline in Saskatchewan's overall crime rate.

We saw a small decline in 2004 – about two per cent – a 6 per cent decline for 2005 – and another 4 per cent drop for 2006.

Most crime in Saskatchewan – 85 per cent in 2006 – falls into two categories: property crime at 35 per cent, and “other” *Criminal Code* offences at 50 per cent. The bulk of offences in the “other” category were mischief, disturbing the peace and administration of justice offences such as bail violations and failure to appear in court.

The decrease of 4 per cent in Saskatchewan's crime rate in 2006 is largely as a result of a 13 per cent decrease in property crime. Break-ins fell 18 per cent, and other thefts dropped 14 per cent.

Our property crime rate is now at its lowest level in more than 25 years.

The number of homicides in the province dropped from 43 to 40 for 2006, although the violent crime rate was up by 2 per cent.

It is important to put the violent crime statistics in context.

15 per cent of all crimes reported in Saskatchewan are violent in nature. In 2006, that was just over 20,000 incidents.

Most violent crime in Saskatchewan – about 60 per cent – is common assault, the least serious form of assault. It includes behaviour such as pushing, slapping, punching and face-to-face threats.

We also see that most violent crime occurs between family members or friends and acquaintances.

You all have the backgrounder with the data so I won't go into more detail on that.

What I want to talk about is what the data are telling us, and how we are responding to offending in Saskatchewan.

We believe, with the third consecutive annual drop in the crime rate, that we have turned a corner and that what we are seeing is a downward trend.

We also believe that our strategy to reduce offending in this province is working.

Working with partners in communities we have developed some targeted approaches to address particular crimes.

The Regina Auto Theft Strategy is a targeted, integrated approach involving the Regina Police Service, Public Prosecutions, Corrections and Public Safety, various community agencies and SGI.

It is a four-point strategy to reduce auto thefts through strict supervision and control of those youth who are most likely to re-offend; an effective combination of enforcement and rehabilitation; and early intervention and education on crime and its consequences.

Based on information received from the Regina Police Service, as of April 2007, car thefts have dropped 61% since the strategy was introduced in 2001.

Building on what we learned from the Auto Theft Strategy, integrated, targeted initiatives have been implemented in the Battlefords, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Meadow Lake and LaRonge.

The Saskatoon strategy is focused on break and enter offences and the Saskatoon Police Service tells us that to April 2007, the number of break and enters has fallen by 52% since the strategy was launched in July 2004.

Each strategy has a different focus and each has a different approach – but these partnerships have two important common elements:

- there is significant community commitment; and
- the strategies are community driven.

These strategies are working – the data we are seeing today tells us that these approaches are effective.

Another initiative to reduce crime is the establishment of bylaw enforcement teams in the two largest cities.

Teams are made up of fire and protective services; the regional health authority; the police service; Safer Communities and Neighbourhood investigators (from Justice); the Department of Community Resources; the local Housing Authority; and community associations.

In Regina the strategy is led by the Regina Police Service and in Saskatoon by Fire and Protective Services.

These teams share information between the different agencies in order to maintain and improve the safety and quality of rental housing stock. A side benefit of ensuring safe housing is that crime issues are also exposed and criminal operations can be shut down.

The cities have tools to maintain safe housing, such as property maintenance and nuisance abatement bylaws, but the establishment of these teams brings all the players together to be even more effective.

The Department of Community Resources has added 610 new housing units and renovated 1,170 low-income homes. The Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement provides an incentive to low-income families to look for good quality housing.

In one Regina neighbourhood, the destruction of sub-standard housing replaced with new units, and renovations to existing houses has attracted long-term tenants. The Chief of Police tells us there has been a corresponding drop in crime in that area.

While these initiatives are largely focused on property crimes, we have also implemented a number of initiatives directed to reducing violent crime.

The North Battleford Domestic Violence Treatment Option Court is a special court that deals exclusively with charges of spousal assault. An accused who takes responsibility for their behaviour is referred for programming aimed at rehabilitation. A second therapeutic domestic violence court was established in Saskatoon and work is underway to establish a third in Regina.

A program to offer services to children who witness or suffer violence in their homes was developed in 1994. In May, the Minister of Justice announced an additional investment of \$370,000 to allow government and community partners to offer new and enhanced programming to children who witness interpersonal violence.

Children who witness interpersonal violence may become victims of abuse or perpetrators of violence as they become adults. The outcome is a learned cycle of abuse that extends through generations. Our goal is to help stop the cycle of violence that occurs in homes and communities, so that our province's children can grow up safe and healthy.

The province has invested on-going funding of more than \$2 million annually to expand suppression of gang activity in Saskatchewan. The strategy includes increased personnel in policing and prosecutions as well as funding for activities such as wire tap surveillance, and execution of search warrants.

While we are putting more resources into enforcement and prosecution of gang activity, it is also important to identify and understand the underlying causes of the gang phenomenon.

The Saskatoon Gang Strategy that was implemented last year takes these important factors into consideration. It is a multi-layered, community-centred approach built on the three pillars of prevention, intervention and suppression.

All of these initiatives are about doing business in a new way.

In closing this morning – it is important to understand that the vast majority of Saskatchewan residents feel safe in their homes and communities, and for good reason. Most Saskatchewan residents are as safe as residents of other provinces.

There are however, exceptions – in Saskatchewan, we continue to see that our poorest communities – in the inner city, on-reserve and in the north – experience the most crime.

We also see that about half the offending against another person, and the victimization that goes with it, occurs within the Aboriginal community. And that a significant amount of violent crime is committed within relationships.

Our reported crime rates are high – this is a matter we take very seriously.

We recognize that a number of social problems manifest themselves as offending and victimization, and that reducing crime also involves providing people with real opportunities to lead positive and productive lives. Particularly in Saskatchewan, this also includes changing the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the justice system.

In May 2005, the Government of Saskatchewan released its Action Plan to respond to the recommendations of the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform. The Province has invested an additional \$39 million in responses to the Commission for 2007-2008.

We are working with our partners in the justice system, in other departments and with communities throughout the province to address these challenges in ways that result in meaningful change.

No single program or initiative will reduce the crime rate in our province. Many new and exciting initiatives have been undertaken and many are showing great promise and success. We will continue to build on that success.

We are committed to continuing to work with our partners in all levels of government and in communities to find solutions with long-term impact.