

Report to the Community on

Security at York

A petition was recently presented to the York Administration raising a number of concerns related to the reporting of security-related incidents and the adequacy of security personnel and their training. It was agreed that a response would be submitted to the York Community via *Excalibur*. This is that response.

First of all, we do not attempt to conceal the facts concerning our security situation. The Department of Security and Parking provides status reports on security on a regular basis. The information contained in these reports is shared with appropriate administrators and distributed to the broader community. Since it was initiated last July, fourteen editions of the Security Department's "Security Alert" bulletins have been distributed campus-wide to every faculty, college, academic and administrative department, and to CYSF and college student councils. This bulletin has on a regular basis described crime trends and figures, and provided relevant advice and guidance to members of the community. Such communications have been further reinforced through other security-oriented articles published in the *York Gazette*, the *York Bulletin*, college newspapers, and through brochures and pamphlets issued by the Department.

Second, there are now systems in place for the regular and timely communication of information concerning security-related incidents to security staff by fellow staff members, and for the transmission of relevant reports to Metro Police. For example, the supervisor of the squad coming on duty is responsible for briefing its members on incidents which have occurred in the preceding 24 hours. Metro Police is to be notified immediately of reported criminal offenses, such as break and entries and severe vandalism. The Open Letter questions the effectiveness of these systems and procedures. This has prompted a review of their adequacy and the consistency of their application, and Security's system for classifying incidents is also being reviewed.

In addition to individual notification to Metro of the kinds of offences noted above, synopses of reported incidents are being hand-delivered to 31 Division every 2-3 days. In response to evident interest in the Community, these summaries, with the names of individuals blacked out for reasons of confidentiality, are now also being distributed regularly to *Excalibur*. In cases of minor theft, especially those involving wallet and purse thefts, victims are encouraged to report the thefts directly to the Metro Police Resources Centre at 967-2222 as this is a faster method of registering the pertinent information than waiting for up to two hours or so to report such a loss in person to a police officer. In addition, individuals are counselled to report the losses of bank and credit cards to the respective issuers.

The Administration is confident of the ability of its security force to provide appropriate levels of security and protection for members of the university community and their individual and collectively-owned property. The problem is not an easy one though. There has been a marked increase in reported incidents over the past two years, some portion of which probably represents an increase in reporting rather than in incidents themselves, but there have in fact been some disturbing increases, such as the wave of office break-ins last spring. Because the University has found that the best defence against crime is prevention, the increased willingness of community members to report suspicious activity and incidents is an important step forward. We have focussed a good deal of attention and financial resources on stepped-up public information programmes, improved lighting on campus, and increased staff complements, most notably to the Student Escort Service, which has experienced a very substantial increase in traffic this year. In February of 1986, for example, 283 men and 1,847 women were escorted. In February of 1987, 955 men and 2,916 women took advantage of the Service. In fact, the total number of "accompaniments" in 1986 almost doubled those for the previous year (22,016 in 1986, as compared with 12,620 in 1985).

Consonant with this emphasis on crime prevention, the primary responsibilities of York Security Officers reflect the requirement to protect and secure, in the broadest possible sense, the person and property of members of the York Community. Security is provided through such specific activities as the escort service, foot and mobile patrols, securing buildings, escorting cash transfers, assisting in vehicle control, documenting and analysing all security-related incidents, and advising community members of suitable alarm systems and other preventive measures.

However, we certainly do not suggest that our arrangements are now at the highest possible level. Unfortunately, the Department has been without a permanent director since late November, 1986. Assistant Vice-President (Physical Resources), Peter Struk, has been acting as Director while a search for a highly qualified director has been proceeding. That search is taking longer to complete than we had hoped. This has delayed the overall review of department policies and practices that a new Director will carry out. That review will address a number of matters raised by the Open Letter. Such matters include staff training, procedures and powers.

To qualify for employment as a Security Officer at York University, an individual must have a minimum of two years of relevant work experience. This can take the form of institutional security service, graduation from a two-year community college law enforcement programme, or police or military experience. While some individuals have extensive experience in some aspects of the profession, and make efforts to share their knowledge and experience on a regular basis with other staff, there is general agreement that Security Department staff would benefit from a structured training and development programme that would cover such areas as crisis intervention (a Metro Police Academy course scheduled for last fall was cancelled upon the death of the instructor), law and procedures, security protection systems, security administration and human relations and communications. The Department is actively discussing the mounting of such a course with a number of area organizations, and anticipates making a final recommendation shortly. The Administration has already declared staff training and development to be an important priority and funds have been earmarked for this purpose.

When crimes do occur on campus, York security officers have powers of arrest and detention, appropriate to the circumstances, under the provisions of the Trespass to Property Act and the Criminal Code of Canada. When warranted by the nature of a particular incident, Metro Police stand ready to respond quickly to Department calls for assistance.

There has been some discussion concerning the pros and cons of York Security staff acquiring Special Constable status. This debate is not confined to the York campus: it is, and has been discussed on and off wherever organizations are seeking to protect their employees and premises. While the statistics show that there is a general increase in such crimes as theft and assault on university campuses throughout North America, there is no convincing evidence that the granting of Peace Officer powers reduces crime and affords greater levels of protection. York University is not facing the extreme conditions which characterize many United States campuses, and we remain convinced that our current classification of security officers is suitable to the security requirements of this university community. We have continued to oppose proposals for the use of firearms, nightsticks, handcuffs and other devices to detain or subdue individuals, because we do not believe that the relatively small number of dangerous incidents we have had on campus justifies that kind of response by the university.

That much said, the Administration agrees that York must explore other ways and means of improving security staff morale and performance and will welcome suggestions on how we might do so both from the security officers themselves and from the broader community. We also agree that an Advisory Committee on Security would help us significantly with this and other security initiatives and we shall put such a mechanism in place as quickly as possible. With the help of the whole York community, the Department of Security and Parking can fulfill its declared goal of making the York educational experience a safe and secure one.

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Vice-President (Finance & Administration)

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