

# Barwatch

**Application for:**

**The 1999 Herman Goldstein Award for  
Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing**



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## Barwatch - Abstract

BARWATCH held its inaugural meeting on July 27, 1995. It was formed on the initiative of several downtown bars in partnership with the Vancouver Police Department. The organization's mandate is to promote the safety and security of patrons in downtown licensed establishments, as well as to build bridges with the Vancouver Police Department and the community.

BARWATCH operates, in a very real sense, on the same basis as Neighbourhood Watch, inasmuch as the downtown entertainment community assists each other, and the Police, in preventing potential problem situations from occurring within member establishments. The primary measure adopted by the group was the employment of video surveillance equipment at the entrances of licensed premises. Currently, member licensees record and archive a library of videotapes for an indefinite period of time, depending on each individual member's requirements.

BARWATCH signs are posted at entrances advising patrons that the premise participates in the BARWATCH program, which is sponsored by the Vancouver Police Department. In most cases, patrons are alerted that they are being video taped by the presence of a video monitor at the entrance of the establishment.

Vance Campbell, of Granville Entertainment Group, who acts as Chairperson of BARWATCH, says that interest in the organization has increased significantly since the announcement of the group's inception at a press conference held at the opening of the storefront police office on Granville Street in mid-October, 1995.

Information has been requested from the Vancouver Fire Department, The Hotel Association, City Hall and many other licensees who are not necessarily located in the downtown core. We have also been sending information to other Canadian and American cities who have expressed an interest in forming their own organizations. Incidents of violent crime have dropped markedly since the inception of BARWATCH, perhaps as much as 60% - 70%, determined by the drop in calls for service to the police or medical departments.

After the initial meeting held between three operators and members of the police department, owners of other establishments in the area were contacted in the hopes of gaining interest in the program. It was very quickly realized that crimes of this nature were occurring in increasing numbers all over the downtown core. A general meeting was set up to discuss these similarities and to come up with solutions.

After our first year, and the inception of Barwatch associations in other cities in British Columbia and Alberta, it was decided to form a Society. This has now been accomplished.

## **Barwatch - Description**

### **A. Scanning**

Barwatch began as a result of discussions between operators of various licensed establishments within the downtown core of Vancouver, British Columbia and members of the police department. Their main concern was the rise in violent crimes or difficulties in dealing with problem patrons (i.e. gang members) in their particular areas. Initially, concerns were raised by staff and operators who were subjected to intimidation and violence. This also affected the patrons in that they became concerned for their own safety when attending these venues. Repeated calls to the police department were necessary for their assistance in dealing with these issues. Bar operators and members of the police department agreed on the importance of opening the lines of communication, with the ultimate goal of determining the best method of dealing with the crimes specific to this area. Members of the Vancouver Police Department agreed with operators that crimes of this nature would have to be effectively dealt with in timely fashion.

## **B. Analysis**

In order to analyze these common problems effectively, members of the police department were contacted in order to obtain statistics particular to the call load to licensed establishments in the downtown core. From the inception, operators and other staff members were repeatedly calling the police for assistance in dealing with criminal activity. People of notorious character have always been involved in Vancouver venues, forcing their way into these places in order to take over and "own" the premise. Quickly, these places would become unsafe for the general public, being increasingly filled with other people with criminal backgrounds, resulting in a loss of sales for the establishment.

Prior to the inception of Barwatch, door staff and other staff members would attempt to refuse entry to these particular individuals. This proved to be unsuccessful as they would simply force their way in, and demand service once taking over a comfortable section. Furthermore, staff members often were subjected to threats and actual acts of violence for the policies of the establishment - in some past cases, death was the result.

As these establishments operate at similar hours, the majority of crimes took place in the late evening or early morning hours, at a time when attendance is at a maximum and police resources were taxed. It was very quickly realized that a need to "self-police" was important if control of these venues were to be re-gained by the rightful owners.

After the initial meeting between operators of licensed establishments and members of the police department, a general meeting was set up to determine if these problems were specific to this one area, or more widespread, and to come up with solutions. Initially, the majority of the interest was from nightclubs in the District One area, therefore Barwatch began there.

## C. Response

At the general meeting, held in mid-1995, many problem-solving options were discussed. Some of these were the use of a general paging system, video surveillance and monitor placement, standardized doorman training, and an increase in police presence.

The paging system allowed one establishment to communicate with other Barwatch members to warn of problem patrons headed in their direction. Once this page was received, all participating establishments would alert doorstaff to be aware. This early warning system enabled them to refuse entry to troublemakers who had been removed from another member establishment. Most members felt that this paging system would be very cost-effective, and a similar system, used by Operation Co-operation, seemed to be extremely successful. This system was eventually discontinued, as they were not used often enough to warrant the costs involved. At the same time, Barwatch quickly began to expand, and other security methods were being discussed.

The video surveillance and monitoring system now became the main focus of the security measures. Large signs were in place at all entrances indicating that anyone entering the establishment would be videotaped. As each patron enters the venue, they would appear on a video monitor at the front door. Several other cameras were strategically placed throughout the establishment, enabling the manager on duty to constantly monitor the environment. Furthermore, these tapes, stored for periods of up to one year, became investigative tools for the police department. For example, if an assault took place anywhere in a club, the officers could seize a tape by means of a court-ordered subpoena. This would remove any responsibility from the manager or staff members.

Some people felt that the presence of these video cameras was an infringement on their privacy, being concerned with the perception of "Big Brother is Watching." The presence of Barwatch signs alerted all potential patrons to the use of video surveillance, giving them the option of entering or leaving. We have found that these signs were also useful as a deterrent to criminal behaviour. In most cases, patrons felt safer and more protected in establishments participating in Barwatch's security measures. In fact, it was very quickly realized that there was a significant drop in requests for police assistance.

Another important issue discussed was the need for a more standardized training program for door staff. At that point, no such thing existed - the closest was the training of security personnel in unrelated fields. We felt that the training of door staff, in particular, was crucial to the success or failure to this program. Problems experienced in these types of venues are unique, quite different to that which might be presented to a security guard in an office building or shopping mall, for example. Doorstaff needed to be able to effectively deal with weapons and the effects of drugs and alcohol, as well as hone their expertise in verbal judo, laws relating to the use of force, and general interpersonal skills.

To our knowledge, no difficulties have been encountered since the inception of doorstaff training. In fact, many potential problems have been diffused as a result of effective communication skills. Many situations have been resolved outside of establishments, rather than inside, making it easier for the police to deal with them.

## **D. Assessment**

To date, we have found that the video monitoring system has been an extremely effective deterrent to potential problems. It is our belief that the crimes experienced prior to Barwatch's beginning are now happening in much smaller quantities and also in smaller pockets of the city. While we realize these problems have not been completely eliminated, they have been reduced significantly.

The evaluation process, conducted by all constituents of Barwatch (police and fire department members, liquor licensing branch members, bar operators, surveillance companies), is ongoing. Better and more cost effective security measures are discussed at all meetings. For instance, one member is travelling to Texas to view a system which simultaneously photographs the picture identification used (i.e. drivers license), and the person using the identification, and stores this information in a computer. This can be printed out at a later date if required by police in order to facilitate an investigation.

Some establishments found that they were unable to afford top-of-the-line camera systems, however there was always a more affordable system available, which could be upgraded at any time.

Response to standardized doorman training has been tremendous. Many companies, some of whom would never have dealt with licensed establishments, have approached Barwatch in the hopes of being contracted for the training. One company in particular was started by members of the Vancouver Police Department. This program, titled BarTalk, is part of the Barwatch program and is offered to all member establishments free of charge. This involves police officers providing a

3-hour presentation, inside the member establishment, for all doorstaff. It includes: diffusing hostile situations, use of weapons, recognizing the effects of drugs and alcohol and verbal judo.

At present, the Attorney General's office is looking at a mandatory training program for all personnel employed as doorstaff. It is for this reason that we are attempting to be proactive in the implementation of a standardized training program.

Other efforts to handle existing problems include the use of stepped-up police presence in nightclubs. A dedicated patrol team consistently conducts licensed premise checks, which provides continual police presence.

Implementation of all of these initiatives has resulted in a significant decrease in the levels of violent crimes in these establishments, and just as importantly, has increased the level of communication between operators and police officers.

Other initiatives being investigated are:

- > The reinstatement of the "Notorious Character" clause into the Provincial Liquor Act, which would allow police officers to remove known criminals from a premise without the involvement of staff and managers, thus removing the factor of intimidation and fear of retaliation.
- > The extension of the Tolerance Period, which would allow for an extended period of time to clear the premise after the sale of alcohol ends. Presently, all establishments must cease to sell alcohol as of 2:00am (Monday to Saturday) and 12:00am (Sunday), and are given 30 minutes to clear the premise after this time. Statistics have shown that the majority of problems occur in this 1/2 hour time period due to the fact that the majority of patrons loiter outside of the clubs. With the extension of the Tolerance Period to a one-hour period, we

believe that the instances of crime will diminish significantly. This time extension has since been approved by City Hall for a Pilot Project in the downtown core.

- > Proactive handling of the No-Smoking Bylaw in the City of Vancouver. We are currently researching available options for the improvement and cleaning of air circulation in licensed venues. We feel that acting ahead of time may circumvent a 100% smoking-ban on January 1, 2000.
  
- > Working with the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia to come up with responsible solutions to drinking and driving issues as a result of people leaving establishments in an intoxicated state. A program entitled The Safe Home program was examined. This project would operate in co-operation with a downtown parking corporation and a taxi company. It would allow a person to leave their vehicle in the parking lot overnight with the understanding that it would be towed if not retrieved by 9:00am the following morning. The patron would then be provided with a safe way home-by means of a taxi, without having to pay the initial \$3.00 cail-fee. This program is still under discussion.

In Vancouver, Barwatch presently exists in two districts, primarily in the downtown region. However, growing interest has been noticed in the other two districts of the city. Our plan is to expand city-wide within the next year. Furthermore, independent Barwatch Associations have been started in Victoria and Prince George, British Columbia, in Edmonton, Alberta, as well as other smaller areas of British Columbia. Seattle, Washington has also shown interest in beginning their own program.

Initially, displacement was a concern, however, with the inclusion of other districts in Vancouver, we feel that this issue is being addressed proactively.

The Vancouver Barwatch Society is an ongoing initiative. As mentioned previously, Barwatch began initially as a means to open up the lines of communication between the police department and bar operators. This has been achieved to a degree beyond our initial expectations. We now have many members of other police department attending our meetings (District Inspectors, District Staff Sergeant, Gang Squad Members, and Neighbourhood Patrol Officers). Other outside security representatives have contacted us in the hopes of being able to provide ongoing training to our members.

## **Agency and Officer Information**

Primary police involvement consisted of a Divisional Inspector and Staff Sergeant. They were invited by our President, Vance Campbell, for an initial meeting regarding concerns raised by their staff. This evolved to our large-scale involvement by members of the Vancouver Police Department. While no initial training was provided to operators, they had all been operators in licensed establishments for many years, thus well able to recognize out-of-control problems.

A general information package is provided to all bar operators who wish to learn more about our program. This package includes a letter providing background of Barwatch, copies of previous meetings, articles from various newspapers and an invitation to attend the next meeting.

To date, given the laws in British Columbia, we have not encountered any serious policing problems. Members of Barwatch continue to analyse, assess and respond to necessary changes. This enables us to better provide a safer environment for both staff members and patrons of establishments.

At present, all funds are raised internally. Barwatch holds an annual fundraiser called the "Change Program." In the three years of operation, this program has raised nearly \$50,000 CDN. This money has been disbursed to community groups in the downtown core who provide care and assistance to street youth. Some recipients of these funds are: The Davie Street and the Granville Street Community Policing Centres, The Dusk to Dawn Youth Resource Centre, Covenant House, Street Youth Job Action, Safe Ride, The John Program and the United Way.

We also require an annual \$100 membership fee from all associations wishing to become members of Barwatch. These funds are to be used for general overhead costs, which include legal fees for formation of our recent Society status.

## **Conclusion:**

Through the joint efforts of community members and the Vancouver Police Department, Barwatch has proved to be a tremendously successful program. This is an example of a problem-oriented policing project, which has been a benefit to both the police department and licensed establishments. During the more than three years of existence, Barwatch has expanded from a mere six members to include more than 30 establishments.

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