

VANCOUVER POLICE

British Columbia News

## **Recruiting woes force officers to shuffle assignments**

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VANCOUVER -- The anti-graffiti unit of the Vancouver Police Department has been very successful in recent years, slashing the rate of vandalism by three-quarters.

But since January, the unit has been in hiatus – a casualty of a lack of new recruits to the force, with its two officers reassigned to more critical duties.

The unit is the only one to have its entire staff reassigned, said VPD spokesman Constable Tim Fanning, but other units are also down as management has had to make tough decisions about where to allocate officers.

Shuffling bodies to where they're most needed is nothing new, but Constable Fanning said it is becoming more frequent as the city gets bigger and busier. While changes are made daily to reflect trends in crime, the vacancies in the force are also making them necessary.

The operations division, which carries out patrol duties, currently has 58 vacancies out of 780 positions. The operations support division, which houses criminal intelligence, tactical and gangs sections, among others, has 15 vacancies out of 210 positions.

Not every one of those vacancies will be filled by a new hire; some result from sick leaves or other absences. But the VPD still has to hire 45 new officers this year to fill the 1,231 budgeted spots.

The department is engaged in an aggressive recruitment campaign, which is going well, according to Constable Fanning. The force is recruiting across British Columbia, with well-attended information sessions held recently in Kelowna and Kamloops.

But the department has to compete with other police forces, including the RCMP, which is also trying to fill the ranks and make up for a number of retirements. An unemployment rate of 4.3 per cent in B.C. has made for challenging recruitment in all fields.

The VPD will be looking for even more officers once the city approves an increase of 48 officers for this year and another 48 officers and 22 civilian staff to be hired over the next two years.

Vancouver City Council heard comments from the public last night on the matter as part of an interim budget meeting. Council approved the motion for the extra officers on April 1, but has to make a final confirmation at its April 15 meeting.

A police department budget increase of \$3.3-million, paid for with a property-tax hike of 0.66 per cent, will cover the costs of the new recruits.

As for the graffiti, an officer will soon return to the unit and resume the fight against the spray-paint vandals colouring the city's surfaces.