

# ALERT



**ALERT**



**ALBERTA LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TEAMS  
ANNUAL REPORT • 2019-2020**



# ABOUT ALERT



**ALERT WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT IN 2006** to bring together the province's most sophisticated law enforcement resources to combat organized and serious crime.

Nearly 300 municipal police and RCMP work together to investigate everything from drug trafficking to child exploitation to gang violence.

The strength of the ALERT model lies in the integration of members from various agencies who have expertise in intelligence, enforcement, and support services.

***ALERT is the overarching umbrella organization of integrated, provincially focused law enforcement activities that promote safe and secure communities in Alberta.***

## ALERT BOARD

- **Chief Graham Abela**  
Taber Police Service
- **Chief Keith Blake**  
Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service
- **Chief Lorne Blumhagen**  
Lacombe Police Service
- **Chief Dale Cox**  
Lakeshore Regional Police Service
- **Chief Dean LaGrange**  
Camrose Police Service
- **Chief Dale McFee**  
Edmonton Police Service
- **Chief Andy McGrogan**  
Medicine Hat Police Service
- **Chief Kyle Melting Tallow**  
Blood Tribe Police Service
- **Chief Mark Neufeld**  
Calgary Police Service
- **Chief Lee Newton**  
Alberta Sheriffs
- **Chief Shahin Mehdizadeh**  
Lethbridge Police Service
- **Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki**  
RCMP K Division
- **Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Bill Sweeney**  
Alberta Justice and Solicitor General

## PARTNERS



Alberta

# SUMMARY

## ALERT BRINGS TOGETHER

Alberta's most sophisticated law enforcement resources and is an overarching umbrella organization of integrated, provincially focused law enforcement activities that promote safe and secure communities in Alberta.

Through integration with ALERT's partner agencies, ALERT serves several distinct public safety goals:

1. **Promote intelligence-led policing**
2. **Disrupt and dismantle organized crime**
3. **Reduce harm and help victims**
4. **Enhance law enforcement capacity**

In 2019-20, ALERT conducted investigations in communities big and small across Alberta that resulted in more than 1,600 charges laid against 366 people and the seizure of \$14.8 million worth of drugs. With its partner agencies, ALERT is keeping Alberta safe from serious and organized crime.

Here are some of the highlights from the past year:

- ALERT's integrated model facilitates the promotion of intelligence-led policing. Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta was able to identify 86 organized crime groups and 1,456 individuals for its 2020 Provincial Threat Assessment.
- ALERT investigations put major dents in drug trafficking across the province. Project Coyote resulted in the largest amount of drugs and property seized in a single operation in ALERT's history, as well as what is believed to be the largest fentanyl seizure in Canadian history at 250,000 pills. Meanwhile, Project Rocker targeted the drug trafficking activity of outlaw motorcycle clubs in Red Deer, while Project Elder cut off a drug pipeline between Alberta and British Columbia. Project Embrace followed a drug trafficking network from rural Alberta towns back to a supplier in British Columbia.

- ALERT's Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit worked with partner agencies spanning from Saskatchewan to Texas to protect children from exploitation over the Internet. ICE teams arrested 74 suspects and forensic technicians analyzed 153 terabytes of data.

- ALERT enhances the capacity of provincial law enforcement by providing specialized training to officers from across Alberta. Nearly 800 candidates received training in 2019-20.

The results achieved in the 2019-20 fiscal year were made possible by the support of the Alberta Government, specifically the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General; Public Safety Canada; and our partner agencies, which are listed on page 2.

Since being formed in 2006, ALERT teams have made nearly 9,000 arrests, seized \$578 million worth of dangerous drugs, and have taken 1,458 guns out of criminals' hands.



**1,629**

charges laid  
(ICE & CFSEU teams)



**\$14.8M**

value of  
seized drugs



**25**

child interventions



**366**

people charged  
(ICE & CFSEU teams)



**121,970**

grams of  
cocaine seized



**259**

agency assists  
by CFSEU teams



**\$4.65M**

proceeds of crime  
seized



**12,482**

methamphetamine  
grams seized



**94**

firearms seized

## MESSAGE FROM ALERT'S CEO

**W**hen I joined ALERT as Chief Executive Officer in August 2019, I could not have predicted how quickly the world was going to change in just a few short months.

As an organization, I believe ALERT has navigated the challenges of COVID-19 very well. Our members have worked tirelessly to keep Albertans safe during the pandemic – especially investigators in the Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit, who saw a significant spike in cases as both children and predators increased their online presence.

Behind the scenes, our support staff worked dutifully to maintain continuity of operations. Even before COVID-19, it had already been an eventful year as several large-scale investigations wrapped up in 2019-20. The biggest of these by far was Project Coyote, spearheaded by our organized crime team in Calgary, which resulted in the seizure of nearly \$20 million worth of drugs, cash and assets. That includes a seizure of 250,000 fentanyl pills,



which we believe is the largest fentanyl seizure in Canadian history.

While getting drugs and firearms off the streets is important, seizing cash and assets from organized crime groups may be more significant, as that hampers their ability to restart operations once they have navigated through the justice system.

As successful as the 2019-20 fiscal year was, we know crime continually evolves and advances in the province, and it is our responsibility

to enhance operations and relentlessly disrupt and dismantle organized crime in our communities. It is a big challenge, but one to which the entire ALERT team is steadfastly committed.

However, ALERT's success could not be realized without the contributions of our policing partners. This co-operative approach to policing has proven to be an extremely successful model, especially as the criminal landscape evolves and pushes beyond local and regional boundaries.

I want to close by acknowledging the Alberta Government's continued support of ALERT. Their financial commitment will enable ALERT to deliver a more robust response to serious and organized crime in Alberta. I look forward to many successes for 2020 and beyond.



**Supt. Dwayne Lakusta**  
**ALERT CEO**



# PERFORMANCE MEASURES

## GOAL 1: PROMOTE INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING

	2018-19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019-20
CRIMINAL NETWORKS IDENTIFIED	87	-	-	-	86	86
ACIIS ENTRIES	3,698	171	379	165	216	931
INTELLIGENCE REPORTS DISSEMINATED	1,934	488	481	485	465	1,919

## GOAL 2: DISRUPT AND DISMANTLE ORGANIZED CRIME\*

	2018-19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019-20
CRIMINAL NETWORK INVESTIGATIONS	167	24	34	43	20	121
PEOPLE ARRESTED BY CFSEU TEAMS	254	69	71	67	85	292
CHARGES LAID BY CFSEU TEAMS	1,419	360	504	239	288	1,391
FIREARMS SEIZED	68	46	22	18	8	94
ESTIMATED VALUE OF DRUGS SEIZED	\$11,929,924	\$11,439,414	\$1,481,561	\$792,462	\$1,128,739	\$14,842,176
ESTIMATED VALUE OF PROCEEDS OF CRIME	\$2,476,896	\$553,748	\$3,407,220	\$465,751	\$228,161	\$4,654,880

\*A detailed breakdown of Goal 2 statistics by region for 2019-2020 is located on page 9

## GOAL 3: REDUCE HARM AND HELP VULNERABLE VICTIMS

	2018-19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019-20
CHILD EXPLOITATION INVESTIGATIONS	1,044	306	381	339	514	1,540
PEOPLE ARRESTED BY ICE UNIT	89	15	18	20	21	74
CHARGES LAID BY ICE UNIT	416	63	57	57	61	238
CHILDREN RESCUED*	24	12	6	3	4	25
CHILD PORNOGRAPHY PHOTOS/VIDEOS IDENTIFIED	380,351	380,877	504,717	74,211	16,764	976,569

\*from sexual abuse, exploitation, luring and/or drug endangerment

## GOAL 4: ENHANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY

	2018-19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019-20
NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES WORKED	266	50	46	55	51	202
TRAINING COURSES OFFERED	26	4	3	7	9	23
CANDIDATES TRAINED	1,154	93	66	350	289	798

# PROMOTE INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING

**GOAL 1: Integrated, intelligence-led policing is supported by strategic and actionable intelligence on provincial and transnational organized and serious crime.**

Strategic analysis and intelligence sharing are the cornerstones of success in fighting organized crime. ALERT promotes an integrated, intelligence-led approach to combating this issue by bringing together intelligence and enforcement teams to share information and work closely on serious and organized crime investigations around the province.



**86**

criminal networks identified



**1,919**

intelligence reports disseminated



**931**

ACIIS entries

ACIIS is the national database for sharing criminal information and intelligence on organized crime.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

### PROVINCIAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

In its 2019 Provincial Threat Assessment (PTA), Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta (CISA) identified 86 criminal organizations to assess and rank them as low-, medium- or high-threat groups. CISA also collected information on 1,456 individuals.

### TIRE THEFTS

In July 2019, ALERT's organized crime team in Lethbridge used information gathered from law enforcement agencies and auto dealerships across the province to arrest a Calgary man for his role in a series of thefts from car lots that dated back more than three years.

The 31-year-old man was accused of stealing tires and rims off cars at dealerships in Alberta on at least eight separate occasions between March 2016 and October 2018. The dealerships were

located in Lethbridge, Leduc, Taber, Wetaskiwin, and Calgary. During the investigation, ALERT relied on the assistance of Lethbridge Police, Calgary Police, Taber Police, and RCMP detachments in Wetaskiwin and Leduc.

It is believed the stolen tires and rims were sold online, and none of the stolen property was recovered.

### STRAW PURCHASING

Information shared between the RCMP's National Weapons Enforcement Support Team (NWEST) and ALERT organized crime teams helped a number of firearms straw purchasing investigations get off the ground during the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Straw purchasing typically involves someone with a valid Possession and Acquisition License (PAL), but no criminal record, obtaining firearms for someone who otherwise could not, or who does not want their name associated with the transaction.

Two of those investigations were in Grande Prairie. First, in May 2019, ALERT's Grande Prairie organized crime team intercepted an exchange of firearms as it took place in the parking lot of a shopping centre in the city. Three suspects were arrested and five firearms – four handguns and a rifle – were seized, along with body armour, ammunition, cocaine and cash.

Later, in October 2019, the Grande Prairie organized crime team arrested a 37-year-old woman during a traffic stop and arrested her for firearms trafficking. It was alleged that she had purchased five handguns over the previous three months – including one that was seized from the vehicle during her arrest – and re-sold them to the criminal market.

The third file concluded in Athabasca, Alta., in May 2019. ALERT Edmonton's organized crime team arrested a 23-year-old man and charged him with firearms trafficking, alleging that he had also bought several handguns and re-sold them to criminals. Only one of the handguns had been recovered at the time of his arrest, and four other firearms were seized from the man's home.



## PROMOTE INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING

# CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

### ***ALERT-DEA relationship shines in Project Coyote***

While the laws they enforce and the methods they use might differ, law enforcement agencies on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border have the same goal: to catch the bad guys.

That shared goal is a big reason why Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams (ALERT) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have developed a great working relationship since ALERT was founded in 2006. Primarily through the DEA's office in Vancouver, the two agencies have worked together on a number of successful files.

The most recent of those files was Project Coyote, which wrapped up in November 2019 and set multiple records for ALERT. In total, almost \$20 million worth of drugs and assets were seized, including 250,000 fentanyl pills – believed to be the largest fentanyl seizure in Canadian history – 98 kilograms of cocaine, five kilograms of methamphetamine, 13 firearms and \$1.3 million in cash proceeds of crime.

"I wasn't expecting how easy the relationship would be," said Det. Laird Linklater with ALERT's Calgary organized crime team, who was the primary investigator on Project Coyote.

"The DEA in Vancouver was willing to help out in any which way they could. From information requests to surveillance, they bent over backwards to help out."

Meanwhile, the DEA says it's very satisfying to see the results of a cooperative effort like Project Coyote, and that kind of success only encourages further cooperation.

"The relationship between DEA and ALERT is successful and growing," said a DEA spokesperson in an emailed statement. "The collaboration between DEA and ALERT on Project Coyote is a great example of how our two agencies can be successful when working together."

The seizure of 250,000 fentanyl pills from a Calgary apartment in February 2018 kicked Project Coyote into high gear, and more than 30 search warrants were executed over the next 20 months. But when targets started booking travel into the United States, Linklater knew he had to call in help.

"We needed to figure what the nature of those trips were, so that's when we started reaching out



to the DEA asking for surveillance resources to determine what the target was up to," he said.

Through a contact with the DEA's Vancouver office, Linklater was able to make requests for information and assistance that were fulfilled quickly and efficiently. This came in extremely handy

when ALERT got information that a Calgary woman was travelling to Houston, Texas, to pick up an 81-kilogram shipment of cocaine and bring it back to Canada. She was

intercepted and arrested by ALERT, the DEA and the Harris County (Texas) Sheriff's Office.

"I believe we have a good working relationship, and hopefully we'll be able to build on it and target the people who are bringing drugs into the country," Linklater said.

That relationship has been built not only on the back of Project Coyote, but other collaborative efforts over the years. The DEA also assisted ALERT with Project Arbour in 2017 and 2018, which involved the seizure of 100 kilograms of methamphetamine near Provo, Utah, and with the dismantling of a cocaine trafficking network in Alberta following the 2012 seizure of 45 kilograms of cocaine in Nevada that were bound for Calgary.

ALERT assisted the DEA in investigating and extraditing two men from Lethbridge to Colorado in 2015, where they were wanted on drug charges.

While organized crime has never respected

borders, the spokesperson added that, in recent years, technology has presented new hurdles in law enforcement's efforts to dismantle international criminal organizations.

"The use of cryptocurrency and encrypted cellphone apps have presented challenges in investigating those international organized crime groups," he said. "The emergence of this new technology makes the working relationships between DEA and its foreign counterparts all the more important."

Linklater said that, in his time working at ALERT, he and his colleagues have become more aware of and gained more experience with international cases, making it more feasible to leverage international partnerships and see those cases through to a conclusion.

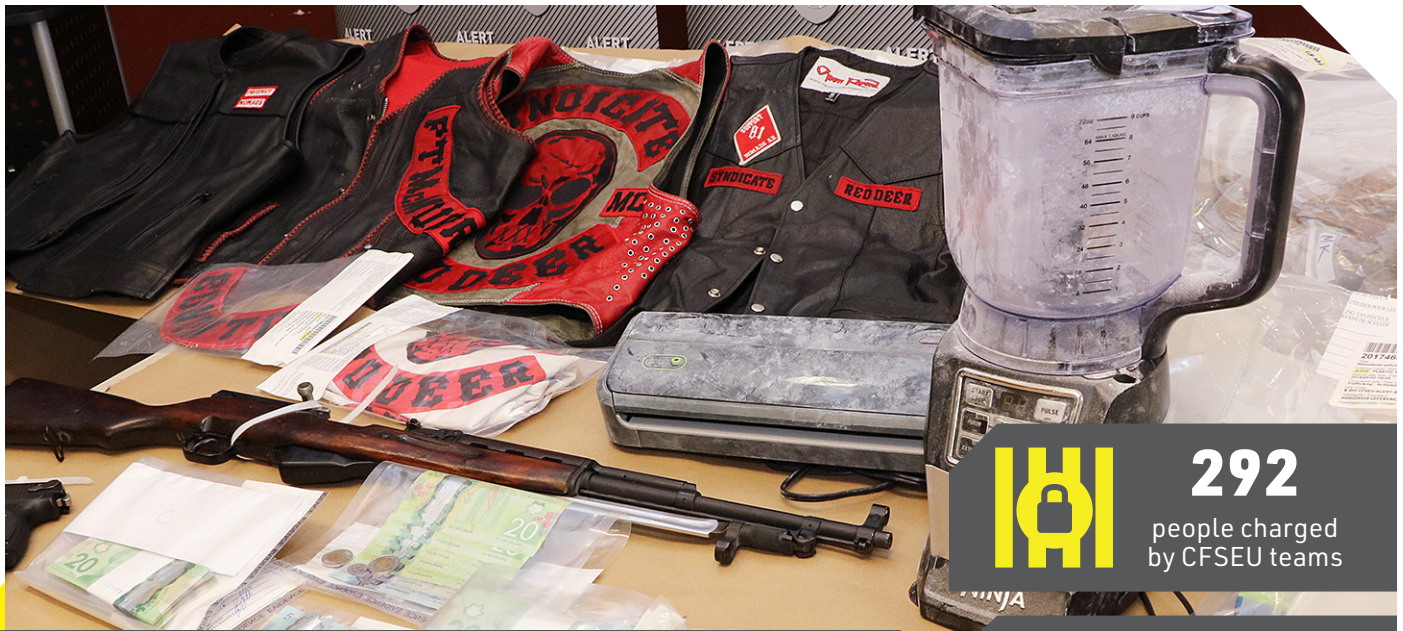
"As ALERT matures and we gain more experience, we're able to go after higher targets who are in control and orchestrating the transporting of shipments or the importation of drugs and money," he said.



### **ALERT-AB.CA EXCLUSIVE:**

**ACIIS is a powerful tool for law enforcement agencies across Canada. But what exactly is it?**

# DISRUPT & DISMANTLE ORGANIZED CRIME



**GOAL 2: Organized and serious crime in Alberta is reduced.**

Integrated policing is one of the most effective ways to battle organized crime because it encourages and fosters collaboration between investigators, intelligence analysts and experts. ALERT can then expertly perform dedicated investigations that span multiple jurisdictions and target the highest threat groups and individuals. Historically, organized crime has been synonymous with drug trafficking; however, organized crime is becoming increasingly complex, is multi-faceted, and is always evolving.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

### PROJECT COYOTE

ALERT hit new heights in November 2019, as Project Coyote set several records for the organization, including the largest estimated value of drugs and assets seized for a single operation.

The two-year investigation by ALERT's Calgary organized crime team – along with the assistance of numerous law enforcement agencies across Canada and the United States – resulted in the seizure of nearly \$15 million worth of drugs and \$4.5 million in cash, property and other assets.

The drug total includes 250,000 fentanyl pills, believed to be a Canada-wide record seizure. It also includes 98 kilograms of cocaine – 81 kilograms of which were intercepted in Houston, Texas, in May 2019 – five kilograms of methamphetamine, 7,626 pills containing meth and ecstasy, ketamine,

heroin, phenacetin, cannabis resin and psilocybin mushrooms.

Thirteen firearms were also seized, along with \$1.3 million in cash proceeds of crime and seven houses.

### PROJECT ELDER

A two-year investigation by ALERT's Edmonton organized crime team concluded in June 2019, cutting off a major drug pipeline between British Columbia and Alberta.

Twelve people from both provinces were arrested and charged with a total of 59 offences. North Vancouver resident Neil Kravets was allegedly at the centre of the network, coordinating the supply of drugs from B.C. to Alberta and overseeing the group's activities.

Two homes, two businesses and multiple vehicles were searched. The drugs seized have an estimated street value of \$1.5 million, and include 9.3 kilograms



**292**

people charged by CFSEU teams



**1,391**

charges laid by CFSEU teams



**\$14.8M**

estimated value of drugs seized



**94**

firearms seized

of cocaine, six kilograms of methamphetamine, and 684 grams of fentanyl powder. More than \$500,000 cash, a handgun with a suppressor and expanded magazine, and five vehicles with hidden compartments were also seized.

### PROJECT EMBRACE

A drug trafficking network that stretched all the way from Vancouver to rural Alberta communities was dismantled by ALERT's Edmonton organized crime team during a nine-month investigation that wrapped up in July 2019.

Project Embrace resulted in the arrest of six people and the seizure of more than \$1 million



# DISRUPT & DISMANTLE ORGANIZED CRIME

worth of drugs. The drug trafficking network under investigation was allegedly centred in Edmonton but spread its tentacles into smaller communities including Bonnyville, Lloydminster, St. Paul, Cold Lake, Little Smoky and Frog Lake.

Six homes were searched – four in Edmonton and two in Vancouver – and investigators seized 6.5 kilograms of cocaine, two kilograms of methamphetamine, 18 kilograms of a cocaine buffing agent, \$342,982 cash, and a vehicle with a hidden compartment.

In conjunction with Project Embrace, Bonnyville RCMP arrested eight street-level drug traffickers in separate investigations and laid multiple drug-related charges against each of them.

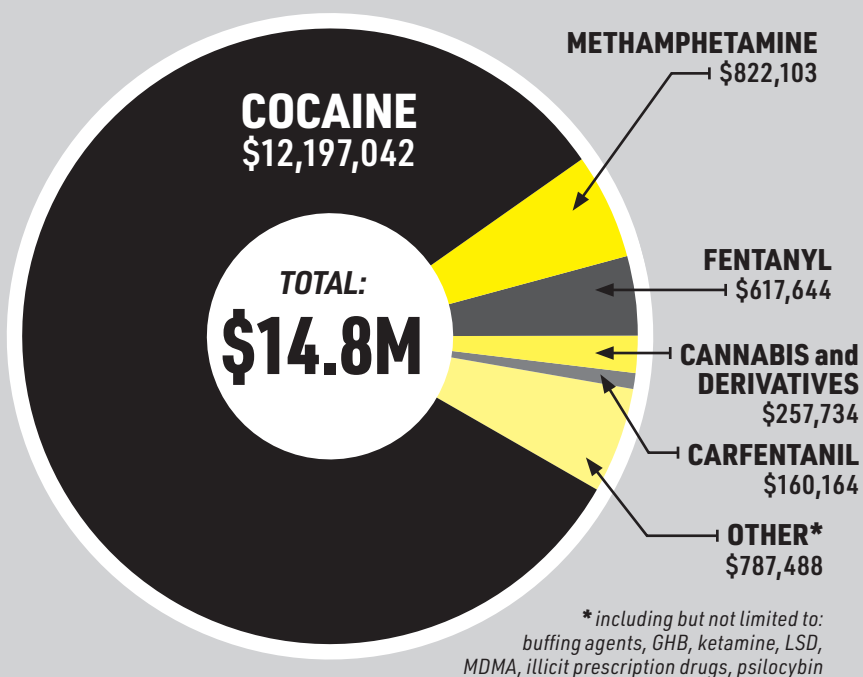
## PROJECT ROCKER

Two full-patch members of a support club for the Hells Angels outlaw motorcycle gang, along with one other person, were arrested as ALERT's Red Deer organized crime team concluded a two-year investigation into the club's suspected drug trafficking activities in May 2019.

The accused are allegedly members of the Syndicate outlaw motorcycle gang. Support clubs are typically utilized to carry out lower-level dirty work for the Hells Angels, such as drug trafficking and expanding territory to secondary markets. The Nomads chapter of the Hells Angels is based in Red Deer.

Three Red Deer homes were searched and an estimated \$350,000 worth of drugs were seized, along with firearms, motorcycles and \$78,794 cash. Drugs seized include three kilograms of cocaine, nine kilograms of a cocaine buffing agent, and 2.8 kilograms of cannabis.

## DRUGS SEIZED - 2019-20



## MEDICINE HAT METH RECORD

ALERT's Medicine Hat organized crime team made what was, at the time, believed to be the largest methamphetamine seizure in the city's history in July 2019.

The two-month investigation concluded with the execution of search warrants at two residences in Medicine Hat, as well as a traffic stop along the Trans-Canada Highway near Brooks, Alta.

Over the course of the investigation, the following items were seized: 1.13 kilograms of methamphetamine; 156 grams of cocaine; seven grams of psilocybin mushrooms; 207 tablets of illicit prescription drugs; a replica firearm; and \$34,145 cash proceeds of crime.

This methamphetamine seizure exceeded the previous record for Medicine Hat, which the ALERT organized crime team set in December 2017 when 1.02 kilograms of meth were seized.

## GOAL 2: REGIONAL STATISTICS – 2019-2020

	CGY	EDM	FTM	GP	LETH	MH	RD	TOTAL
CRIMINAL NETWORK INVESTIGATIONS	7	24	16	7	7	35	25	121
PEOPLE ARRESTED BY CFSEU TEAMS	20	83	29	15	17	85	43	292
CHARGES LAID BY CFSEU TEAMS	145	306	101	60	61	351	367	1,391
FIREARMS SEIZED	19	11	1	25	1	9	28	94
ESTIMATED VALUE OF DRUGS SEIZED	\$9,335,709	\$3,860,567	\$63,855	\$569,465	\$240,371	\$522,438	\$249,772	\$14,842,176
ESTIMATED VALUE OF PROCEEDS OF CRIME	\$3,847,454	\$666,333	\$0	\$83,970	\$54,706	\$2,417	\$0	\$4,654,880

# DISRUPT & DISMANTLE ORGANIZED CRIME



## GOOD NEIGHBOURS

*Alberta, B.C. work together to curb interprovincial crime*

Organized crime doesn't respect provincial borders, but thanks to cooperation between police agencies in British Columbia and Alberta, more effort is being put into tackling criminals who operate interprovincially.

Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams (ALERT) and the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit – British Columbia (CFSEU-BC) have had a long-standing working relationship as they investigate and take down organized crime operations that stretch across both provinces.

Staff Sgt. Dave Paton was the primary investigator on ALERT's Project Elder, which wrapped up in June 2019 and involved a pipeline of drugs flowing from B.C. to Edmonton and Calgary. The man alleged to be at the centre of the network was arrested in North Vancouver.

"I would venture to guess that probably, of the files I worked while I was at ALERT, upwards of 70 per cent had connections to B.C.," said Paton, who has since been promoted and transferred to the Edmonton Police Service's Economic Crimes Section. "Some of them, it was difficult to know where they were sourcing their drugs from, but pretty much on every other occasion where we were able to get an idea where they were sourcing drugs from, it was all coming out of B.C."

While Project Elder started with a suspect in B.C. and wound its way into Alberta, another major ALERT investigation from 2019, Project Embrace, went the other way.

Project Embrace primary investigator Const. Nick Clarabut saw that file follow a network of

street-level dealers in rural Alberta communities like Bonnyville, St. Paul and Cold Lake to an organized crime group in Edmonton, and then to a supplier based out of Vancouver. More than \$1 million worth of drugs and cash were seized.

"It's obviously extremely important to be able to see what targets are doing in B.C. from an investigative standpoint," he said of the cooperation between the two provinces. "One can rely on source information to identify what targets are doing, but to corroborate that source information with observations or enforcement, it is easier as an investigative team to direct the investigation."

Meanwhile, CFSEU-BC media relations officer Sgt. Brenda Winpenny said plenty of B.C. cases have ties to Alberta, including major conflicts between organized crime groups.

"Historic B.C. gang conflicts continue to result in violence today between the Red Scorpions/ Bacon Brothers and the UN Gang and its affiliated groups, some of which are established in Alberta," Winpenny said.

She adds that the expansion of the Hells Angels outlaw motorcycle group – which already has several established chapters in Alberta – into B.C. is a major area of concern.

In 2019, CFSEU-BC's Provincial Tactical Enforcement Priorities process identified 33% of threat groups based in that province operating interprovincially. "The gang landscape in British Columbia involves criminality that spans across communities and jurisdictions, resulting in the need for a coordinated and integrated approach



by all levels of law enforcement," Winpenny said. "CFSEU-BC has leveraged partnerships with law enforcement agencies in B.C., as well as other provinces, including Alberta, in situations where an interprovincial nexus to B.C. gangs has been identified."

For Alberta investigators like Paton and Clarabut, having agencies in B.C. that are willing and able to lend a hand are a huge asset.

"Over the five years I worked for Edmonton ALERT, I would say that it's been a great relationship," said Clarabut, who is now working with ALERT's Lethbridge organized crime team. "For me, this would probably be the start of making those connections as an investigator to other investigators in B.C. I think I'm at a point now where I'd have no issues getting help if I gave them a call."

"All the agencies in B.C. were awesome and fantastic to deal with; everybody gets it," Paton said.

And such cooperation has led to a shift in how police approach these sort of large-scale investigations, Paton said.

"Earlier in my career, it seemed to be, in policing in general, we never really went after the sources, the people actually bringing drugs into locations. But in my time at ALERT, it seemed like we were doing that. That was exactly what we were going after," he said. "Although it wasn't in all cases, we had mostly gotten away from targeting the average street-level dealer. If you look at drug dealing as a multi-level marketing model, these guys are on the lower end of that model. I got the sense that ALERT was tackling the guys higher up in those chains."



## DISRUPT & DISMANTLE ORGANIZED CRIME

# PROPERTY CRIME ON THE RISE

### ***'Undeniable correlation' between theft, drug issues***

The link between the drug trade and property crime has been prevalent for years. But the commander of ALERT's organized crime team in Medicine Hat says property crime perpetrators are more brazen in their thefts than ever before.

Staff Sgt. Kelsey Fraser has been a police officer for 22 years. He said that there is an "undeniable correlation" between the rise in drug issues in Medicine Hat and the "exponential" rise in property crimes.

"We have open-air shoplifting now, where people don't even try to mask it," Fraser said. "These people are known drug users in our city. It has almost become a common behaviour now, to see these drug users and people in that subculture at stores, walking in and walking out with a cart full of goods. It seems that the culture and the conscience of people have changed to fuel their habits. They just don't care."

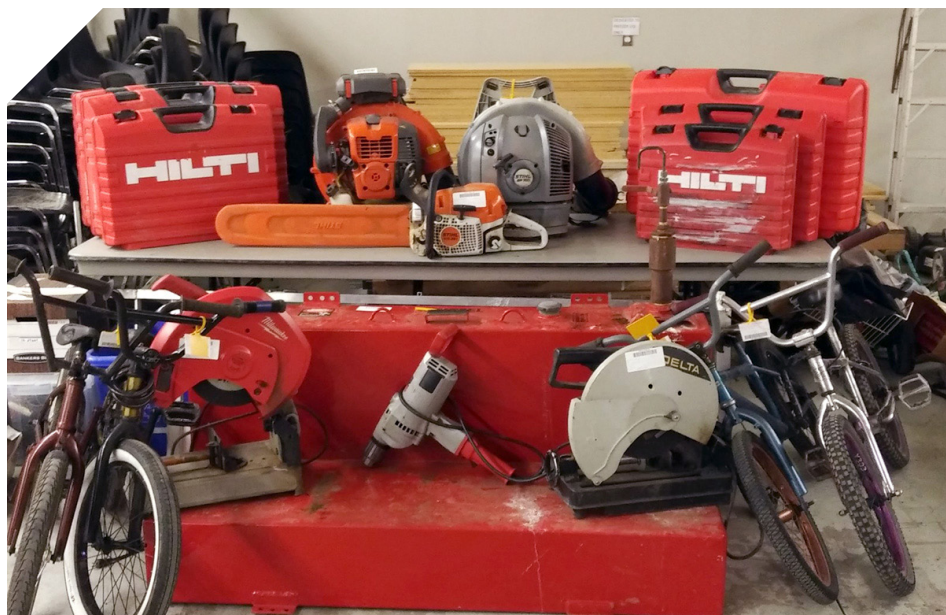
Sometimes, people with addictions will steal property and sell it for cash to buy drugs. But Fraser says what's becoming more common is for drug dealers to send people with addictions out with a list of goods to steal.

"Some of those goods have become commodities; they're better than cash to some people that are waiting for them," he said.

"We've actually seized physical shopping lists from people that were caught doing a bunch of thefts. And they've said in the interviews, 'Yeah, if I get all these things rounded up and give to this dealer, then I'm gonna get my two ounces of coke or meth.'"

Having led the Medicine Hat Police Service's Priority Crimes Team before joining the ALERT organized crime team, Fraser said he has seen all sorts of items stolen: food, electronics, clothes, even electric toothbrushes. "Anything that's not locked down can get stolen. Honestly, if it's not bolted down and they want it, it will go."

And with larger organized crime groups



Stolen property recovered by ALERT Medicine Hat during an investigation that concluded in December 2019.

getting in on the action, the scale of goods being stolen is ramping up as well.

"We've had files over the years, and even recently, where it's not just theft from stores or small-time break-ins – it's skid steers and vehicles being stolen and moved to different parts of the province," Fraser said. "It's any level of commodity, from shoplifting at a big-box store to stealing a \$70,000 truck attached to a Bobcat on a trailer."

Dealers might keep the stolen property they receive, or they might try to sell it on social media platforms or to pawn shops. But Fraser says the second-hand shops in Medicine Hat

have become much more proactive in recent years.

"Ten years ago, we weren't organized with local pawn shops in combating the resale of stolen goods. But since that time, we've become a coalition of sorts with our pawn shops and taken an organized approach to preventing and curbing the resale of stolen goods through pawn shops," he said. "If we deem something stolen and they paid out on it, we take the property

back. They don't want to incur those losses either."

And police have tried to reciprocate: "We could tell them that we just had a whole bunch of drills stolen; if you see one, be wary who you're buying it from. It's proactive communication to them," Fraser said.

Meanwhile, Fraser said he has seen a concerted effort from community members to curb property theft. One of the most effective tools is the MHPS smartphone app, through which the service receives many tips every day.

"The good thing is that our community isn't getting in the way or putting themselves in harm's way trying to intervene," Fraser said. "They're keeping themselves safe, but they're not just sitting on the information; they're sharing it."

As for how people can avoid having their property stolen, Fraser says an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

"My personal advice has always been: If you don't want to lose it, don't leave it out," he said. "That's a really easy rule. I'm still amazed when I read files where people have their wallets or purses or electronics stolen from trucks that are unlocked. If you value it, so does somebody else who can't afford to buy it, and they're going to take it if given the opportunity."

**"Anything that's not locked down can get stolen. Honestly, if it's not bolted down and they want it, it will go."**

# REDUCE HARM & HELP VICTIMS



**GOAL 3:** Law enforcement activities reduce harm and provide necessary supports to vulnerable victims, including the drug-addicted, sexually exploited children, and victims of domestic abuse.

ALERT teams work to protect Albertans, reducing harm and taking measures to better ensure the safety of our province. They get harmful drugs off the street, intervene in the lives of children being abused or drug-endangered, and protect children from online sexual exploitation offences.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

### SASKATCHEWAN COOPERATION

ALERT's Internet Child Exploitation Unit (ALERT ICE) and the Saskatchewan Internet Child Exploitation Unit (Sask ICE) worked together in June 2019 to quickly apprehend two men and rescue two children from potentially harmful situations.

The case began when Sask ICE received information about two men accessing cloud-based child sexual abuse material and discussing sexually assaulting children over social media. They soon discovered one of the suspects was located in Alberta and shared information with ALERT ICE to further the investigation.

Two days after the initial information was received, Sask ICE and ALERT ICE respectively executed search warrants in Rocanville, Sask., and Red Deer, Alta. Numerous electronic devices were seized and one man was arrested at each location. Two

children were also rescued, and each province's respective children's services department was engaged to care for them.

The Rocanville man, 35, was charged with eight criminal offences, including sexual interference and agreement to commit a sexual offence against a child. The Red Deer man, 40, was charged with 11 offences, including sexual assault, sexual interference, sexual exploitation and incest.

### CHILD ENDANGERMENT CHARGES

In the course of their investigations into drug trafficking operations across the province, ALERT teams sometimes run into situations where children are being put in danger through their parents' or guardians' proximity to drugs, weapons and violence. In these situations, investigators have the ability to lay charges under Alberta's Drug-Endangered Children Act.

In June 2019, ALERT's Edmonton organized crime team searched two west Edmonton homes as part of a drug trafficking investigation. Two young



**74**  
people charged  
by ICE Unit



**238**  
charges laid  
by ICE Unit



**25**  
child interventions  
(ICE & CFSEU teams)



**976,569**  
child exploitation  
photos/videos ID'd



**1,494**  
exhibits and  
devices seized

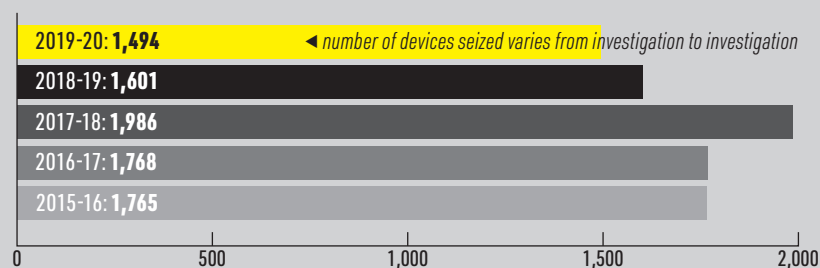


**153**  
terabytes of  
data analyzed

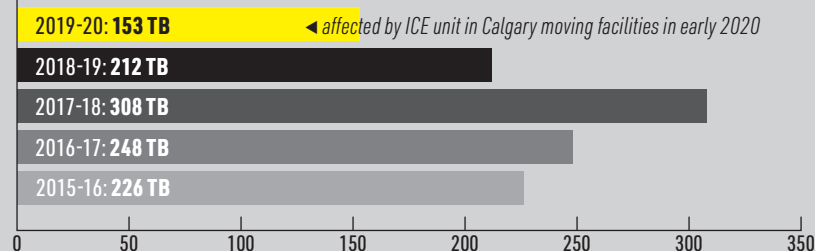


# REDUCE HARM & HELP VICTIMS

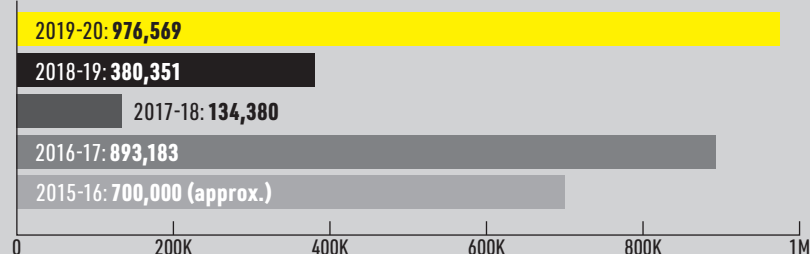
## ICE UNIT STATISTICS 2015-20



### DEVICES SEIZED



### DATA ANALYZED (TERABYTES)



### CHILD EXPLOITATION PHOTOS/VIDEOS IDENTIFIED

children were found to be living at one of the homes. Their parents were charged with child endangerment, while they and one more suspect were charged with drug- and firearm-related offences.

#### MEDICINE HAT ARREST

ALERT's ICE Unit arrested a 26-year-old Medicine Hat man in September 2019 for multiple sexual offences involving children and animals.

ICE alleged the suspect had been accessing child pornography online, and his computers and electronic devices were seized. Further investigation revealed additional sexual offences

committed against at least one child, who is believed to be known to him, and other alleged sexual offences involving several dogs.

He was charged with sexual assault, bestiality, and accessing, possessing, and distributing child pornography.

#### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The internet knows no borders, so ALERT's ICE Unit once again took on several investigations this year that required collaborations with law enforcement agencies in other countries.

## COURT UPDATES

### WESLEY VANDER LEEUW

- **September 2019:**  
Sentenced to 3 years, 9 months in prison
- **January 2017:**  
Arrested by ALERT ICE Unit after engaging in conversations with an undercover operator

### [EVANSBURG FATHER]\*

- **September 2019:**  
Sentenced to 23½ years
- **January 2017:**  
Arrested by ALERT ICE Unit for offences committed against his own daughters

### [RED DEER FATHER]\*

- **September 2019:**  
Sentenced to 11 years, 3 months in prison
- **January 2017:**  
Arrested by ALERT ICE Unit in joint operation with Saskatchewan ICE; shared child pornography and discussed sexually assaulting children online with another man in Rocanville, Sask.

\* Names cannot be published due to publication bans

One such investigation concluded in August 2019, when ALERT executed a search warrant in Edmonton and arrested a 35-year-old man. Based on information shared by members of the Abilene (Texas) Police Department, ICE investigators alleged that the man was luring a nine-year-old girl from Abilene over the internet, engaging in explicit conversations and sharing nude photographs over a social media application for several months.

The man was charged with child luring, exposing a child to explicit material, making child pornography, distributing child pornography, and possession of child pornography.

## REDUCE HARM & HELP VICTIMS

# LOOKING OUT FOR LURING

### *Definition of charge is broad, says ICE investigator*

The word "luring" conjures up every parent's worst nightmare: Their children are enticed by a predator they met online to leave the house and meet up with them in person.

But Det. Leigh Happner with ALERT's Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit says that, when laying charges in an investigation, the definition of "luring" is quite a bit broader.

"The suspect – who doesn't necessarily have to be an adult; it can be someone under the age of 18 – has to use some kind of telecommunication device – a phone, a computer, whatever – to communicate with someone they know or believe to be under 18, and they're trying to facilitate a secondary offence occurring," she said.

"That secondary offence doesn't necessarily have to have occurred; for instance, if a suspect is speaking with a child under the age of 18 and asks them for a nude photo, they're luring to try to facilitate the making of child pornography.

"Regardless of whether or not the child sends the image, the offence of luring has occurred."

According to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, their Cybertip reporting service has averaged about 300 confirmed reports of luring attempts per year over the past two years. "Many of these reports are submitted by teens themselves who have gotten in over their heads," said associate executive director Signy Arnason.

Happner said that she has seen the number of files that include luring that cross her desk decrease slightly in recent years, though she's not certain if that means kids are getting wiser about online safety or if they are going unreported.

"We get files where the suspect will try, and



Parents need to talk to their kids about their online activity to keep them safe from exploitation and luring.

the kid will shut them down and say, 'No, I'm not sending you any nude photos,'" she said. "The kid has done the right thing. Yes, it's technically luring, but if it was reported, then we'd have to evaluate our caseload to determine if we're actually going to action that file."

But ALERT's integrated approach to law enforcement allows ICE investigators to work on such files more thoroughly, liaising with local, national and even international partner agencies to track down suspects and other victims.

"Quite often, what we do find with luring is, when we end up arresting somebody, that person who came forward is not the only victim. If it's a true luring investigation, we often find that the suspect has multiple victims. But we just need one person to bring it forward to us so that we can uncover all the rest of the victims and

the true scope of what that person has been up to," Happner said.

"It's really important to liaise with other law enforcement agencies at all levels. With any ICE file, we have a strong network of investigators; everybody kind of knows everybody. And we liaise with them at different points. Sometimes it's because a victim has come forward here and the suspect is in another country, so we contact them and send them the information. Or the victims may be somewhere else, so we need to involve law

enforcement in that jurisdiction involved to get in contact with a victim and get their statement."

With the rise of live-streaming platforms, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection is worried about how easily predators have access to potential victims in real time, and thus has focused much of its messaging recently to helping parents keep kids safe on these apps. "The risks are amplified with live streaming given that youth often don't consider that the person on the other side could be recording their live stream, which is then shared with other offenders, and sometimes used to extort more images or money from the teen/tween," Arnason said. "It is the immediate direct access that adults have to children that is incredibly problematic."

In any case, Happner says that knowledge of their kids' online activity is the best measure parents have to prevent their kids from becoming the victim of luring.

"Parents need to know their kids' passwords and who their kids are talking to online. It's important that kids only speak online with people they also know in person," Happner said. "From a parental standpoint, they should be monitoring their kids' online activities, whether it be limiting the duration they're allowed on the devices, or physically checking through the apps, or even going as far as installing parental monitoring software. It's super important that parents monitor, and communicate with their kids so that, if it does happen, a child feels that they can disclose it to their parents without being grounded." ■

**"Regardless of whether or not the child sends the image, the offence of luring has occurred."**



## REDUCE HARM & HELP VICTIMS

# PANDEMIC IMPACTS ICE UNIT

### *Child exploitation files spike sharply during COVID-19*

When COVID-19 arrived in Canada, life slowed down for people who started working from home and cutting back on social activities. But, for investigators in ALERT's Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit, things only got more hectic.

In March 2020 alone, the ICE Unit took in 243 online child exploitation files – more than double the unit's monthly average of 110 over the previous two years. That upward trend continued in April and May as Albertans were encouraged to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19.

"Nobody anticipated what the byproducts of a worldwide pandemic would look like. In terms of child exploitation, that was something I think snuck up on people," said Staff Sgt. Dominic Mayhew, who heads up the ICE team based in Calgary. "When you look at it retrospectively, you can see how the pandemic added to risk factors that accounted for a spike, but I can't say we were anticipating a tidal wave."

Mayhew adds that, prior to March, a busy month might have entailed executing six search warrants. In May 2020, they executed 12.

Staff Sgt. Mike Zaparyniuk, the officer in charge of the Edmonton-

based ICE team, says that the number of files his team took in between January and May 2020 was up 63% compared to the same period in 2019. That puts a strain on investigators as they try to figure out which files are the most serious and need immediate action.

"Everything that comes in here is red hot; everything is something that we can action," he said. "But when you get this mass influx at once, they're already working a ton of files, but now you have to figure how to take those files and spread them out throughout the office."

When files come in, they are analyzed and suspects are checked against law enforcement databases before they go to the staff sergeant to be assigned out. Along

with the analysis and deconfliction results, pushing a file forward depends on factors like the quantity of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) found, the severity of the material, or the immediate danger a child might face.

More work for investigators also means more work for the ICE Unit's forensic technicians, who sift through the devices seized from suspects to prepare evidence for Crown prosecutors.

"When investigators do more search warrants, they bring back a ton more devices for the techs to work on," Zaparyniuk said. "And nowadays, people can store and access things anywhere – hard drives, thumb drives, gaming

consoles, anything you can think of."

Even on a typical day – let alone in the middle of a pandemic – ICE investigators and technicians deal with heinous crimes. The staff sergeants strive to give

members the support they need by maintaining open-door policies and checking in frequently.

"All our employees have access to psychological services. And we know that building a personal wellness plan is very individualistic. How to create that resiliency is something we try to get each of our members to think about in advance," Mayhew said.

"Many of us in the unit are parents, and we're exposed daily to CSAM, which is never easy," Zaparyniuk added. "There's mandatory psychological testing for each of the members, and they seek their own outlets, such as hobbies or physical fitness, to take their minds off what they see."

As Alberta recovers from COVID-19, Zaparyniuk feels ICE intakes will go down, but they may never return to pre-March 2020 levels. "Now that people are starting to get back to routines, it's not going to change their behaviour if they want to look at CSAM," he said. ■

**"In terms of child exploitation, that was something I think snuck up on people."**



ALERT ICE Unit Staff Sgt. Mike Zaparyniuk says that, while kids are spending more time online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so are adults looking to exploit them.

# ENHANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY



**GOAL 4:** Law enforcement officers possess an advanced level of expertise, skills, and knowledge to effectively and efficiently target gangs, organized crime and serious crime in Alberta.

ALERT intelligence and enforcement officers conduct sophisticated, long-term criminal investigations that require advanced training and knowledge. ALERT supports police by providing elite training to enhance the ability of officers to detect and disrupt organized crime in Alberta.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

### TRAINING DEPT. REBRANDS

In order to serve ALERT members and staff better, Alberta Specialized Law Enforcement Training (ASLET) has rebranded to ALERT Training. The new name became official in early 2019.

"The name change reflects a shift in focus for ALERT Training to better align with ALERT's public safety priorities," said ALERT CEO Supt. Chad Coles at the time. "ALERT Training will prioritize our internal training needs, and seek to sufficiently equip our members with the required skill sets necessary to combat serious and organized crime."

Members of ALERT and its partner law enforcement agencies can still access

course offerings through ALERT's website at [www.alert-ab.ca](http://www.alert-ab.ca).

### FIRST CURRICULUM

ALERT Training celebrated a major milestone in 2019 with the completion of its first curriculum fully developed and designed in-house.

The course is designed to bring new ALERT employees up to speed on the organization's disclosure software. It was developed to be delivered in a wide variety of settings, from a full classroom to one-on-one sessions.

"It's a good accomplishment for us," said ALERT Training acting manager Leila Andrews. "We now have a fully developed in-house program that we own; there's defensible curriculum and student resources to be used. It's a really neat



# 259

agency assists  
by CFSEU teams

ALERT provides assistance to policing partners, corrections, government, schools, and NGOs.



# 23

courses offered



# 798

candidates trained

accomplishment."

The course itself is only four hours long, but Andrews estimates that more than 160 hours of work went into designing it. Edits, updates, pilot sessions and instructor training have tacked on even more hours.



# KEEPING ALBERTA SAFE

## AGENCIES ASSISTED

### LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Blood Tribe Police Service
- Calgary Police Service
- Camrose Police Service
- Canada Border Services Agency
- CFSEU-British Columbia
- CFSEU-Saskatchewan
- Edmonton Police Service
- Lacombe Police Service
- Lakeshore Regional Police Service
- Lethbridge Police Service
- Medicine Hat Police Service
- Peel Regional Police Service (Ontario)
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- RCMP Federal Serious and Organized Crime
- RCMP Historical Homicide Unit
- RCMP Major Crimes Unit
- RCMP National Weapons Enforcement Support Team (NWEST)
- Saskatchewan Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit
- Taber Police Service
- Toronto Police Service
- Waterloo (Ont.) Police Service
- York Regional Police Service (Ontario)

### INTERNATIONAL

- Abilene (Texas) Police Department
- Drug Enforcement Administration (United States)
- Grant's Pass (Oregon) Police Department
- New Zealand Police
- United States Department of Homeland Security

### GOVERNMENT

- Alberta Health
- Alberta Justice & Solicitor General
- Department of National Defence

### EDUCATION/NON-PROFIT

- Grant MacEwan University
- Zebra Centre for Child Protection

## COMMUNITIES WORKED



## AGENCY ASSISTS

**TOTAL AGENCY ASSISTS  
BY CFSEU TEAMS  
IN 2019-20:** **259**

### BY ASSISTANCE TYPE

Intelligence Sharing	79
Expert Advice/Opinion	61
Specialized Skill	46
Surveillance	29
General Investigative Assistance	26
Presentations	16
Unable to Assist Due to Workload	2
Request Does Not Meet Mandate	0

### BY CFSEU TEAM

CFSEU Calgary	57
CFSEU Edmonton	62
CFSEU Fort McMurray	29
CFSEU Grande Prairie	42
CFSEU Lethbridge	35
CFSEU Medicine Hat	6
CFSEU Red Deer	28

### TOP AGENCIES ASSISTED

RCMP	162
Edmonton Police Service	29
Calgary Police Service	16
Lethbridge Police Service	14
CFSEU-Saskatchewan	7
Camrose Police Service	4
CFSEU-British Columbia	3
Taber Police Service	3
Blood Tribe Police Service	3

# **ALERT**



**[www.ALERT-AB.ca](http://www.ALERT-AB.ca)**