

MEDIA RELEASE

City of Williams Lake



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For Immediate Release

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Council Requests Reinstatement of Electronic Monitoring Program

City of Williams Lake Council has submitted an open letter to all Provincial Court of British Columbia Judges; the Honourable David Eby, Attorney General; and the Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, expressing its concerns regarding sentencing for criminals conducting unlawful activities during the wildfire evacuations, as well as requesting reinstatement of the Electronic Monitoring Program.

Mayor Walt Cobb says, “Williams Lake residents have worked hard to combat crime in our community, and have come together to strive toward becoming a crime-free community. We have increased resources, including installing additional security cameras, and have changed policies and bylaws to provide the RCMP with extra tools. We have increased policing to full capacity, with the Province providing an additional six RCMP officers. The Community Policing volunteers have become a model for other communities in this province. During the evacuation, residents were significantly stressed, and sensitive to what happened during this crisis. For thieves to take advantage of this situation should not be tolerated.”

Williams Lake RCMP arrested two individuals on July 11, 2017 during the evacuation order. A search warrant uncovered several other items that were believed to have been taken from evacuated homes. Several charges were stayed, and one of the criminals was sentenced to 12 months’ probation and house arrest.

During house arrest, the individual was arrested for domestic assault.

Councillor Scott Nelson states, “There is no question that the Electronic Monitoring Program must be reinstated, so that individuals on probation can be monitored 24/7. City Council was shocked to hear how many persons are not compliant with their bail release or probation conditions. It is of significant concern if these individuals are not where they have been directed to be by the courts, because we then have no idea where they are, or what they are doing, and the risk to re-offend is significantly increased.”

City of Williams Lake Council has questioned why the former Electronic Monitoring Program is not currently employed, and whether there are any overwhelming reasons why it cannot be restored. The concern lies not just with the expense of monitoring, but with real unease about the activities of persons unlawfully at large, and the threat they pose to the citizens of our community.

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With that said, we were shocked to hear how many persons are not compliant with their bail release or probation conditions. We understand that Community Corrections and Williams Lake Crown Counsel do their best to suggest conditions that make the community safer, and that the police also do their best to ensure compliance. From February 2017 to December 2017 inclusive, the Williams Lake RCMP completed 842 curfew checks on various offenders. A number of the curfew checks conducted revealed the offender to be non-compliant. It is of significant concern when these individuals are not where they have been directed to be by the courts, because we then have no idea where they are or what they are doing. We make this statement based on the assumption that if they were not a threat to our community, they would not require conditions at all. In addition, considerable police time and resources are devoted to conducting curfew checks.

Years ago, it was very common for persons on bail, or those serving sentences at home, to be on the Electronic Monitoring Program. The program provided an electronic bracelet or anklet which the offender would wear. This technology, as it existed twenty years ago, notified the police when the person left their residence in violation of their conditions. It seems surprising and regressive that this program no longer appears to be getting any use. Given the resources devoted to monitoring these offenders, with well over 800 checks last year alone, it seems sensible to consider the advantages we could realize from a technological solution to monitoring compliance. Our community invests nearly \$1 million per quarter towards policing and we feel an obligation to advocate that these resources are used as efficiently as possible.

We would appreciate making the courts aware that the former Electronic Monitoring Program has disappeared, and question whether there are any overwhelming reasons why it could not be restored, and what other ways we could efficiently use our scarce resources to efficiently monitor offenders at large in our community. Our concern lies not just with the expense of monitoring, but with real unease about the activities of persons unlawfully at large, and the threat they pose to the citizens of our community.

In closing, we understand the significant pressure the judicial system is under, due in large part to continued repeat offenders; however, we respectfully request the courts and judges to take into consideration the community appetite to see stricter penalties applied to these types of criminals. We also ask that you support City of Williams Lake Council's initiative to have the Electronic Monitoring Program with an electronic bracelet or anklet reinstated.

Yours respectfully,

Mayor Walt Cobb

Councillor Ivan Bonnell

Councillor Scott Nelson

Councillor Jason Ryll

Councillor Craig Smith

Councillor Laurie Walters

Councillor Sue Zacharias