

City has by far the most per capita hate crimes reported in country

Thunder Bay has 22.3 hate crimes per 100,000 people reported to police, nearly six times the national average.



Thunder Bay Marina - photo by Jonathan Hendel

THUNDER BAY – Thunder Bay had nearly six times the number of police-reported hate crimes in 2015 compared to the national average, a statistic that a city councillor admits is “disconcerting.”

According to data released by Statistics Canada, the city had 22.3 hate-motivated incidents reported to police per 100,000, far above the Canadian average of 3.8 per 100,000.

The next highest census metropolitan area was Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo with 9.4 incidents per 100,000 people, while Peterborough and Hamilton followed with 7.4 and 7.3 respectively.

Of the 26 total incidents reported in Thunder Bay in 2015, 10 of them targeted an Indigenous person. That represented nearly 30 per cent of all incidents victimizing an Indigenous person in Canada.

Coun. Rebecca Johnson, a member of the city's anti-racism advisory committee, said the report further illustrates that there is a problem in Thunder Bay.

"As a community, we have to stop and say this is not who we really are," Johnson said. "It's an international situation. So how do we address that? How do we identify to the world, to the country, that we are still a community you want to come to, that we are a community you want to live in?"

The number of incidents reported in Thunder Bay has fluctuated over the previous three years with available numbers. While the 2015 numbers nearly double the 16 reported incidents in 2014, they are comparable to the 2013 report which showed 25 hate crime incidents.

Thunder Bay Police Service Const. Julie Tilbury said a hate crime awareness committee was introduced in 2012 and developed a media campaign to encourage reporting hate-motivated incidents.

"The Thunder Bay Police have worked directly with stats Canada to train statisticians to accurately stat incidents as there is no uniform definition of hate Crime in Canada," Tilbury said in a news release.

"Training was also provided to a number of officers so they could more accurately capture information and support victims of these types of incidents. An officer is specifically tasked to monitor hate incidents and support victims so they could access resources needed to deal with these incidents.

The hate crime data applies to criminal incidents believed to be motivated by race, religion, sexual orientation.

"Police are pleased that citizens are reporting these types of incidents to them as it is understood that these incidents often go unreported," Tilbury said in a news release.

"However, the number of incidents reported is still troublesome and indicated that there is much work for our community to do to ensure all members are safe from hate."

Johnson said the advisory committee is working towards finalizing a new action plan and is looking at consulting with other municipalities such as Winnipeg and Duluth to learn about how those communities are combatting racism.

"You do not address racism overnight. It's not like fixing a pothole," Johnson said.

"This is a social change. This is a one-on-one, slow evolution to change the community and to change the world because we are not the only community that has racism."

Johnson said differences should be celebrated and embraced, rather than become the target of hate.

“We really need to educate. We need to communicate. We need to connect with people,” Johnson said. “This is a new, exciting community full of wonderful new people. We have to learn to get together and how to respect each other because it’s an exciting opportunity. This is our multicultural community and it’s wonderful.”