

## [NewsCanada](#) Almost 40 death investigations are being re-examined in Thunder Bay

And for the first time the civilian police watchdog group plans to hold a public meeting in the city on Sept. 25.



Gerry McNeilly, of the Office of the Independent Police Review Director, said the agency will for the first time hold a public information session in Thunder Bay to discuss the progress of the investigation into allegations of systemic racism within the police department. (RENE JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR) |ORDER THIS PHOTO

By [TANYA TALAGA](#) Staff Reporter  
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Investigators probing the Thunder Bay police for allegations of systemic racism are re-examining 30 death investigations plus nine cases of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls that date to the 1990s.

The Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) has been [under investigation](#) by the Office of the Police Review Director since November. More than 100 Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens of the northern city, police officers, organizations, Thunder Bay city councillors and others have been interviewed by the watchdog group under the direction of Gerry McNeilly.

The OIPRD, which operates at an arm's length from the Ministry of the Attorney General's office, began investigating the police service's handling of cases of murdered and missing Indigenous people in Thunder Bay after complaints by First Nations leaders who say cases involving First Nations people are often [closed and dismissed](#) without proper examination.

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Racial tensions in Thunder Bay heightened after the deaths of two Indigenous teens in May, and the July 4 death of Barbara Kentner, a 34-year-old mother who was struck in the stomach by a thrown metal trailer hitch as she walked down a Thunder Bay street and who died later in hospital.

As part of its investigation, the OIPRD is conducting case reviews involving 30 deaths going back a number of years, McNeilly said. Those cases are mostly of Indigenous people but some non-Indigenous deaths are among the 30, he added. In addition to that are nine murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls cases that go back to the 1990s, according to his office.

McNeilly said it is important for his team of investigators — many retired police officers with experience in homicide cases — to perform extensive reviews that compare how the Indigenous cases and non-Indigenous cases were conducted by the Thunder Bay police. “It is no secret there are some concerns with how the investigations are being carried out. I felt it was necessary for me to not just look at Indigenous death investigations but also look at others to ascertain how the TBPS is conducting these investigations. If there are problems with the investigations, I’d like to think that it is not with just one group of people,” he said.

When asked if there was anything he could publicly report at this time about the death reviews, McNeilly would only say that he is “seeing some patterns that concern me but at this time I don't want to identify those patterns.”

The OIPRD will hold its first public information session on Sept. 25 to discuss its progress and to appeal to the community for help and guidance.

“This time, it is necessary. We have done a lot of outreach, interviewed a lot of people both in the indigenous community, the police community, the city council but I need to get the public pulse,” he said.

McNeilly said his team is “working diligently” and they hope to get their report out by the time winter is over so everyone in Thunder Bay can “collectively move forward” and heal.

The OIPRD has held meetings with First Nations leaders, the acting chief of police and others officers and he believes Thunder Bay is going to “keep moving together” toward a better place.

