

Municipal Security Agent (MSA) program

Municipalities across Canada face growing security challenges.

Law enforcement agencies are increasingly stretched thin, resulting in summary offences, bylaw infractions, and public disorder (minor crimes) often not attended by police, and definitely not being investigated.

While law enforcement might label a crime minor, the person whose belongings were stolen, window broken, car vandalized, etc. is traumatized and left feeling unsupported by law enforcement.

Even for major crimes, law enforcement response times are greater than the desired five to seven minutes, depending on location. In Toronto, police response times to major crimes average around 20 minutes! Many crimes are completed in seconds to minutes: assault, robbery, rape, murder, etc. All can be completed long before the police arrive.

Also gone are the days of community engagement by the police. Police no longer conduct foot patrols, engage casually with local businesses, or attend community meetings.

This is not meant to disparage police! Growing communities, increasing costs, increasing documenting, stagnant budgets, and an over-burdened court system means police must prioritize their time to the more serious situations and get the most serious offenders off the streets. However, the lack of a police presence has emboldened criminals.

Enforcement vacuum

There exists an ENFORCEMENT VACUUM for minor crimes. This enforcement vacuum is harming the relationship between police and the community. Criminals are aware of the vacuum, and are taking advantage of it. A solution to the enforcement vacuum and long response time is the use of private security.

Montreal, Vancouver, Hamilton, Waterloo, and other communities already have security professionals walking beats, engaging with those living and working in the communities, addressing situations before they escalate, and working with emergency services on more-serious situations. Some municipalities also have security professionals enforcing parking and bylaws.



Wherever they are stationed, security professionals are immediately on scene and the first link in the emergency response chain.

Liability

An investigation into the training provided and/or required by security professionals working for communities found no standard. Some communities require only the provincially-mandated basic security training. Some communities offer a few days or weeks of specialized training.

As these security professionals are taking on roles historically done by police, the role evidently has inherent risk. Training is critical, to ensure that security professionals can safely and effectively conduct their assigned roles and responsibilities. Insufficient training opens the security company and municipality to liability.

Formalizing the Municipal Security Agent (MSA) program

The Municipal Security Agent (MSA) program is designed to fill the enforcement vacuum and address the long police response time using private security. Security professionals become the liaison between the community and law enforcement. They are often first on scene. They can assess the situation, handle minor situations themselves, and bring the appropriate emergency services for the situation. They can conduct welfare checks, investigate noise and disturbance complaints, investigate bylaw complaints, investigate lost property, and de-escalate disputes.

The MSA program is a cost-effective, community-focused security and public safety solution. The idea is to train and certify security professionals to a higher standard. Municipalities can leverage the presence and flexibility of private security to patrol public areas, enforce municipal bylaws, deter crime, de-escalate situations, and support emergency services. MSA's can request the appropriate emergency services for more serious situations.

Training is critical to ensure safe and effective actions by security professionals, and to mitigate liability concerns. MSAs provide municipalities with a structured, professional presence that engages the community, enhances safety, and enhances public trust while reducing reliance on police for minor and non-criminal matters.

Benefits of the MSA program

Alleviate pressure on the police: MSAs could handle non-criminal matters, allowing police to focus on major crimes.

Enhanced bylaw enforcement: MSAs could be empowered to issue citations and ensure compliance with municipal bylaws. For example: trespassing, crowd control, traffic management, parking, event security, scene security, encampments, etc.

Enhanced law enforcement: MSAs could be empowered to detain and arrest for indictable Criminal Code offences.

Improved response time: MSAs could be authorized to respond to alarms and patrol properties, which speeds up response time. They would decide if additional police, fire, or ambulance responses are needed.

Security detail: when fire or ambulance crews are called to questionable areas, or on request, MSAs could be dispatched to form a perimeter security detail.

Cost-effectiveness: a dedicated municipal security force would reduce long-term costs associated with crime, property damage, and law enforcement interventions.

Increased public safety: MSAs could provide foot, bicycle, and vehicle patrols; community engagement in parks, play grounds, transportation hubs, business districts, special events, etc.; after hours alarm response; and proactive security measures to deter crime and disorder.

Increased community engagement: MSAs could work with businesses and community leaders to identify and report community issues to appropriate authorities, resulting in a faster response and safer neighborhoods.

Increased well-being: the MSA program is an investment in community safety and well-being, which builds recognition and respect for government and law enforcement.

Better integration with social services: MSAs could work with other organizations to identify and help persons who may be homeless, trafficked, abused, mentally or physically ill, or otherwise in need of social services.

Better integration with emergency services: MSAs would provide a coordinated approach to public safety, and support first responders during situations.

Training

These training requirements were based on consultations with the security industry and municipalities. Assessment and possible revision of these training requirements will be conducted during implementation and regularly thereafter.

The MSA program requires security professionals to complete four weeks of training beyond the provincially-mandated basic security training program. This training develops the knowledge and skills to safely and effectively perform in the field. This training includes

- 64 hours of online training
 - verbal control tactics, situational awareness, situation management, patrol, legislation and legal procedures, mental health first aid, documenting, communicating, court procedures
- 96 hours of in-person training
 - physical control tactics, first aid & CPR, arrest and search procedure, enforcement procedures
- field training
 - four weeks under the supervision of a field training officer

In addition, MSAs should wear body cameras and be able to communicate directly with emergency services.

Conclusion

The Municipal Security Agent program provides municipalities with a structured, professional, and accountable security solution that enhances public safety, improves bylaw enforcement, deters crime, supports communities, supports other emergency services and reduces the strain on police resources.

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