



LAW ENFORCEMENT REVIEW AGENCY 2002 ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED

More complaints filed, more investigations completed

The annual report of the independent agency that investigates public complaints about municipal police forces in Manitoba shows 2002 was a busy year.

The Law Enforcement Review Agency (LERA) deals with complaints made against police officers at 14 services across the province. It does not investigate criminal matters, but focuses on complaints arising from the way officers perform their duties.

“The public relies on the police to uphold the law, protect life and property and to do so in a respectful way,” said George Wright, LERA Commissioner. “When someone feels they have been unjustly treated by the police – that police misconduct has occurred -- the complaint process established under *The Law Enforcement Review Act* allows for the incident to be investigated and a resolution sought.”

Last year, 227 formal complaints were filed with LERA, the highest number of complaints filed with the agency since its inception. Most complaints were registered against the largest municipal police force in the province, the Winnipeg Police Service. Complaints were also filed against the Dakota Ojibway Police Service, the Brandon Police Service and one complaint was filed against the R.M. of Victoria Beach Police Service. The remaining services had no complaints registered against their members.

The number of new investigations, combined with ongoing files meant the agency worked on a total of 430 investigations in 2002. The number of investigations completed last year increased to 235, marking an improvement in addressing complaints more quickly and effectively.

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Cases can be resolved through an informal process. Where an informal resolution is not possible and enough evidence exists supporting the complaint, the matter can be referred to a provincial judge for disposition at a public hearing. A total of 12 complaints were referred for a hearing last year.

Complaints included allegations of abuse of authority, arrest without reasonable or probable grounds, using unnecessary or excessive force, using oppressive or abusive conduct or language, and being discourteous or uncivil.

The small number of complaints alleging the misuse of pepper spray and handcuffs remained consistent, while incidents alleging injuries from use of force decreased slightly to 71.

This year's annual report, a number of previous years' reports, links to other civilian law enforcement agencies and more information about LERA are posted on the agency's newly expanded Web site at www.gov.mb.ca/justice/lera.