



NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE

Police Service Board Report

PUBLIC AGENDA

Subject: Annual Report - Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation)
January 1 to December 31, 2024

Report To: Chair and Members, Niagara Police Service Board

Report Date: 2025-02-21

Recommendation(s)

That the Niagara Police Service Board (Board) receive this report for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to advise the Board that the Niagara Regional Police Service (Service) is in compliance with By-Law 438-2024 – Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation).
- The Chief is required to make a written annual report to the Board with respect to investigations of child pornography (Internet child exploitation).
- This report is submitted to the Board for review and consideration of information relating to the Service's response to child pornography (Internet child exploitation).

Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications relating to the recommendations contained within this report.

Analysis

In accordance with By-Law 438-2024, the Chief shall make a written report to the Board on or before August 30 of each year in respect of the investigations of child pornography (Internet child exploitation). The report shall include:

- a) a summary of the written procedures concerning child pornography (Internet child exploitation) investigations, including charges since the date of the last report;
- b) the status of Service compliance with the said procedures; and
- c) a summary of the steps taken by the Service to monitor and evaluate response to child pornography occurrences.

This Board report will outline each of the above and confirm our compliance with the By-Law:

- a) *"...a summary of the written procedures concerning child pornography (Internet child exploitation) investigations, including charges since the date of the last report..."*

General Order (GO) 169.08 - Internet Child Exploitation Investigations was updated in 2021 and is scheduled for re-evaluation. This GO addresses the requirements of Adequate and Effective Policing Regulation LE-036 and Board By-Law 438-2024, Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation).

The Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit has established a local police response to crimes against children perpetrated via the Internet. In addition to a reactive response to public complaints, investigators proactively initiate investigations of identified targets, authoring search warrants that are judicially authorized and executed locally. This leads to the identification and arrest of offenders possessing, distributing, and making child pornography, and persons who utilize the Internet to lure children into sexual activity.

Since 2007, the ICE Unit has continued full-time membership in the Provincial Strategy to Protect Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation on the Internet. This initiative has led to a high level of interagency co-operation and successful joint investigations of Internet child exploitation throughout the province, nationally, and internationally. The Service's ICE Unit conducted joint investigations with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security, Interpol, and local police agencies across Canada and throughout the United States.

The ICE Unit continues to respond to referrals provided by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) through the Operational Child Exploitation Analysis Network (OCEAN). Major corporations such as Microsoft, Google, and Meta (Facebook) monitor their networks for the presence of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and report their findings from Canada to the RCMP. RCMP analysts examine these images/videos to determine if they contain CSAM and then distribute these referrals to the responsible agency for further investigation. OCEAN referrals have remained very high and are the primary contributor to the ICE Unit workload.

The ICE Unit is mandated to categorize all images and videos of child pornography following an investigation. Technology continues to provide increased storage capabilities at a very low cost. This has resulted in large seizures of electronic data that in one instance led to media collections of over 750,000 images and 50,000 videos of varying lengths. The ICE Unit uses specialized software designed to detect CSAM; however, each image and video must be viewed and confirmed by an investigator. This process continues to be labour intensive and is imperative in satisfying the Provincial Strategy mandate to assist in identifying victims.

In 2024, the ICE Unit received a total of 265 referrals from OCEAN and conducted 110 investigations of CSAM and Internet luring within the Niagara Region. The ICE Unit also received numerous Cybertips and Crime Stoppers tips, with most relating to incidents of

“sextortion”. In essence, “sextortion” is a form of extortion, which occurs when someone online threatens to distribute a person’s private and sensitive content if they fail to provide them money or personal images that are of a sexual nature. Such incidents tend to originate in overseas countries and involve international organized criminal networks, which causes many investigative and prosecutorial challenges.

The following is a summary of investigations conducted during the past three years:

Child Pornography and Internet Luring Investigations

Year	OCEAN Referrals	Referred + Proactive	Arrests	Criminal Charges
2022	246	70	16	61
2023	249	103	16	52
2024	265	110	32	116

b) *“...the status of Service compliance with the said procedures...”*

With the assignment of child pornography and luring investigations to 4 specially trained officers, the Service has ensured and maintained a consistent high quality, specialized response to these types of incidents. The number of investigators was increased by 1 in the 2023 calendar year in response to the high workload experienced by the ICE Unit. Currently, the ICE Unit has 2 investigators trained to conduct proactive undercover luring investigations with 1 more investigator slated for this training in 2025. All investigations are supervised by the officer-in-charge of the Electronic Crimes (E-Crimes) Unit and evaluated to confirm compliance with the Adequate and Effective Policing Regulations and GOs with respect to child pornography and related criminal investigations.

c) *“...a summary of the steps taken by the Service to monitor and evaluate response to child pornography occurrences...”*

ICE investigators participate in a structured training regimen consisting of relevant topical Ontario Police College and Canadian Police College courses, as well as Provincial Strategy mandated training and international conferences, which has led to high-quality, consistent training, and best practices that are updated on an ongoing basis. In the current workload and training environment, it takes approximately two years to fully train an ICE investigator. Ongoing training is required to address the continuously changing and emerging technologies of the Internet, as well as the technical abilities of offenders.

While attending specialized training sessions, via Internet access and in the course of regular duties, investigators are in daily contact with ICE colleagues from other police services throughout Canada and internationally. This continued contact ensures that the Service’s response is consistent with, or exceeds, the current standards of practice elsewhere in Ontario and Canada.

The daily subject matter and nature of these investigations can be psychologically and emotionally demanding for even the most resilient of investigators. In addition to the regular competitive processes utilized in the selection of ICE investigators, psychological testing is conducted prior to the confirmation of an applicant, and annual follow-up examinations are conducted to ensure the psychological health and well-being of investigators, in accordance with established recommendations and standards.

The Service remains in compliance with By-Law 438-2024 Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation).

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Police Service/Board Strategic Priorities

To comply with the provisions of Board By-Laws and to maintain compliance with Adequate and Effective Policing requirements.

Relevant Policy Considerations

Board By-Law 438-2024 Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation)
GO 169.08 – Internet Child Exploitation Investigations

Other Pertinent Reports

8.9 – 2024.03.28 - Annual Report – Child Pornography (Internet Child Exploitation) Investigations – January 1 to December 31, 2023.

This report was prepared by Rob Moore, Staff Sergeant, Forensic Services Unit and reviewed by Chris Lemaich, Inspector, Investigative Support Services and Dave Masotti, Superintendent, Investigative Services. Recommended by Mario Lagrotteria, Acting Deputy Chief, Community Services.



Submitted by:

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Chief of Police

Appendices

Not applicable.