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POLICE DOG SQUAD TACKLES CRIME

Criminals have bitten off more than they can chew in Melbourne's south east with the Victoria Police Dog Squad arresting more than 235 people in the past year.

Since January 2007, six police officers from the Victoria Police Dog Squad have been based at Springvale Police Station, heavily targeting crime in Region 5, which encompasses Greater Dandenong, Casey, Cardinia, Frankston, Mornington Peninsula, Morwell and Bairnsdale.

During this time, the squad (comprising of one Sergeant and five Senior Constables) has responded to 1377 incidents, including complaints of intruders on premises, break and entering offences, sexual assaults, homicides, searches for missing persons, armed robberies and burglaries.

The Dog Squad also provides a physical police presence at unruly parties and brawls where they assist local police in dispersing crowds.

The Squad works in partnership with local Divisional Intelligence Units to target areas where offences are currently occurring, such as train stations, shopping centres, unattended schools and commercial and industrial areas.

The K-9 units also travel to regional areas such as Bairnsdale and Morwell for special operations such as the current public order operation, Operation Bairnsdale Street Safe.

All dogs are fully trained in tracking, searching, protecting life and property and their sense of smell is more than fifty times greater than that of humans.

Dog Squad Sergeant Glenn Barrot said the skilled canines played an important part in operational policing.

"In an age of technology, none of the various physical devices have yet duplicated the natural instincts and abilities of a dog to track human scent or detect hidden persons or property," Sergeant Barrot said.

"Dogs can often crawl or jump onto places where it would be impractical or impossible for police members to go."

Sergeant Barrot said being based at Springvale allowed the Dog Squad to promptly respond to incidents in Region 5 and had resulted in a significant number of arrests and charges.

He said the greatest demand for dogs is at night, when a dog's acute sense of smell is most needed.

"All of the jobs we attend are time critical, especially in relation to tracking. The dogs need to track the most recent human scent.

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“By basing us here in Springvale, the response time is now greatly reduced and we can quickly respond to incidents

“Our presence in Region 5 has had a significant impact on crime and public behaviour in the local area, with the Dog Squad contributing to more than 235 arrests in 2007 and attending 1377 incidents,” Sergeant Barrot said.

Some of these incidents include:

- A 31-year-old suicidal woman was reported missing to police a few hours after her last sighting. Her car was found abandoned in a car park near a reserve in Sommerville. The Dog Squad was able to track the woman into bushland where they located her laying semi-unconscious. She was transported to hospital for treatment.
- An armed robbery was committed at a Dandenong North Milk Bar when an offender entered the shop armed with a kitchen knife. The dogs tracked a scent along Heatherton Road and up the drive-way of a medical centre where they located the offender hiding in bushes at the rear of the building. He was still armed with a knife and the dogs were used to subdue him. He was subsequently charged with armed robbery.
- Police were alerted to a burglary at a hardware store in Cranbourne when an alarm was activated. Security surveillance showed two men entering the store but not leaving. The Dog Squad was called in to search the store whereby one of the dogs located an offender hiding in a spa bath at the top of some high shelving. Both offenders were charged with burglary and theft.
- The Dog Squad was able to track down a man following an alleged indecent assault in Springvale. After the teenage victim reported the incident to police, the Dog Squad was called and tracked down the offender. A 26-year-old man was subsequently charged with indecent assault and assault with a weapon.
- In Doveton, a man believed to be under the influences of drugs, attempted to enter a rear sliding door. Police were called and the dogs tracked the man to a nearby home where they found him hiding down the side of the premises. He was subsequently charged with attempted aggravated burglary.

Region 5 Acting Assistant Commissioner Emmett Dunne said the co-location of Dog Squad members at the Springvale police complex was a terrific initiative which provided local police with further operational support.

“Having Dog Squad members based at Region 5 gives police more timely access to the unique and invaluable services of the police dogs and handlers.

“Their presence in the region enhances our capacity to promptly resolve a wide range of operational incidents and is of great benefit to community safety,” Assistant Commissioner Dunne said.

Sergeant Barrot said the Dog Squad is now looking for new dogs to continue the vital work of the K-9 unit and replace those that have passed on or are no longer able to perform.

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“We’re looking for pure-bred German Shepherds or Rottweilers aged between 12 months to two years,” he said.

If you think you have a suitable dog, please visit the **Victoria Police website** at **www.police.vic.gov.au** or contact the **Dog Squad** on **9333 1300**.

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