

## **Neighbourhood Safety Audits**

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

1. **What is a safety audit?** A Safety Audit is a tool that measures an individual's and a neighbourhood's perception of fear. It can also evaluate physical and social structures in a neighbourhood that can perpetuate crime and a lack of social cohesiveness. Safety Audits allows groups of individuals to come together to move through the physical environment of a neighbourhood, evaluate how safe it feels to them, identify social and physical changes that can improve safety and organize a way to bring action to those changes. Audits are led by a community safety practitioner, usually one trained in CPTED<sup>1</sup>, through a neighbourhood with the residents and users of an area. Participants are asked a series of questions including what their personal experiences are, how a space makes them feel and what changes they would like to see in the area. Pictures are taken and anecdotal data is collected. This information then is compiled into a report capturing the voice of the participants along with crime prevention recommendations that may include CPTED strategies and/or programming. Findings from an audit can help police and decision makers identify priorities and incorporate crime prevention measures that can directly target these areas, leading to safer and healthier neighbourhoods.
2. **How does my neighbourhood get involved?** There is no application process. Due to limited capacity and resources we will only be able to reach about 6 neighbourhoods. COVID protocols will also make this type of initiative a bit more challenging. Contact the Community Policing Coordinator for more information (see contact information below).
3. **What criteria will be used to select the participating neighbourhoods?** Methodology is currently being developed to identify neighbourhoods who would most benefit from an audit. We will be looking at both qualitative and quantitative data to help select these neighbourhoods. Some of this data will include police statistics, census data, neighbourhood consultations done recently, and anecdotal information provided by community members, nonprofit agencies, RCMP members and city staff.
4. **How many members of a neighbourhood are required to participate?** There is no minimum number for an audit. Normally audits will try to incorporate the diversity of the neighbourhood and include as many of these viewpoints into the audit. Safety is perceived very differently depending on an individual's abilities and lived experiences. Audits conducted in the past have included roughly 12 – 15 people. A group that is manageable in numbers allows for a bit more intimacy in the audit for more meaningful dialogues. Sometimes when we get a much larger group we will split up into smaller groups.
5. **What specifically will be required of participants?** Normally an audit starts with a briefing where the process and goals of the audit are discussed. The route of the audit is also planned and confirmed. Then the group walks the proposed route talking about physical and social elements in the neighbourhood that affect safety, positively or negatively. Prior to the audit, we will engage residents by communicating about the initiative and asking them to complete a pre survey that will highlight specific issues or an area of the neighbourhood that residents believe we should focus on. The survey will also ask about general feelings of safety. This allows those who aren't able to participate in the actual audit to provide feedback and input.

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<sup>1</sup> Crime Prevention through Environmental Design



6. **What is the expected time commitment for individuals participating in this initiative?**  
Participation can be as little as a few minutes or 2-3 hours participating in the actual audit.
7. **Will surveys be conducted using accepted survey methodologies and will participant responses be anonymous?** Our partner in the initiative is Vancouver Island University, Criminology Department. Their support will provide oversight especially in the area of ethics and consent for participants and the research. All surveys will be kept anonymous. In the actual audit, those participating will know others that will be participating but the data that they provide that will be incorporated into the reporting will not be tied to any identifying content. This will include addresses and/or other contact information.
8. **What other participants outside of residents will be invited to participate?** Some other possible participants in the audits may include RCMP members, City of Nanaimo staff and council and other decision makers who would benefit from hearing about a neighbourhood's concerns. The challenge will be to ensure that we can conduct audits safely under COVID protocols. Another key representative that we would like to engage in the audits are local business owners and operators. Businesses have a key role to play in neighbourhood safety.
9. **What benefits will neighbourhoods get from participating in this exercise?** The benefits will vary depending on the neighbourhood and the specific challenges they face. Some examples include looking at physical elements of a neighbourhood and how CPTED strategies can improve safety in an area. The audit can highlight social elements that are helpful or lacking in a neighbourhood. The audits can provide an educational element to residents on the diversity of safety concerns their neighbours have. This creates a better understanding between neighbours and can forge stronger relationships within neighbourhoods which is one of the principles behind Block Watch and many other crime prevention strategies. Audits can also inform policy and decision making at a variety of levels within a community and where there is a feeling of frustration among residents, a chance to have their voice heard.
10. **Will participants receive the results of the audit on their specific area?** Yes, reporting back will happen for each neighbourhood participating. This will happen in the form of a report and where possible an in person presentation.
11. **Will participating in an audit remove all the crime in my neighbourhood?** No, causes of crime are complex and directly connected to the social determinants of health. For example some social determinants of health include, income, social supports, education, employment, etc. These topics are outside of the scope of the neighbourhood safety audits. We also know that many of the issues that neighbourhoods are facing stem from the current opioid and homelessness crises we are facing. These crises are complex and require a multi-pronged approach. Audits however will be able to support residents with education and practical solutions on how they can reduce the opportunities for crime in their area. Audits highlight what crime prevention programming can be introduced in an area. Audits can also help form relationships between neighbours, agencies and other participants which helps further the dialogue and often a first step to solving any issues.

If you have further questions, please contact the Community Policing Coordinator at [christy.wood@rcmp-grc.gc.ca](mailto:christy.wood@rcmp-grc.gc.ca) or 250-755-3163