

CopWatch Coalition PROPOSAL

What is the CopWatch Coalition and what are its goals?

CopWatch Coalition is a loose coalition of groups and individuals who will work together against targeted policing and police violence in Vancouver. We are united on the following goals:

- to expose police violence and abuse of power,
- to deter police violence through the monitoring of police activities,
- to strategize a range of inclusive tactics for addressing the problem,
- to mobilize the people directly affected by it, and
- to ensure no group, nor individual, can be politically isolated by the police.

How will the work be divided and decisions made?

The coalition will have a steering committee and two organizers. The steering committee is comprised of nine people elected every six months from the general meeting of the CopWatch Coalition and are responsible for the following:

- mobilizing the public against specific acts of police brutality and targeted policing,
- expanding the coalition's base of supporting groups and individuals,
- researching policing issues and developing an institutional analysis of the role of police in society,
- developing propaganda that serves to counter and undermine public support for policing solutions to social problems, and
- applying pressure on government, police department, and community policing centers to hold police accountable to the law.

The two organizers, elected by the general meeting of the CopWatch Coalition, will run the CopWatch patrols. They will be responsible for the following:

- coordinating patrols to observe police actions and document cases of police brutality, educate people of their rights when dealing with the police, and intervene when warranted,
- maintaining a hotline for reporting incidents of police harassment and abuse, and
- developing a photo-catalogue of police officers, their badge numbers and names and correlate these with incidents of police brutality.

The role of the steering committee is to put into action decisions made by the general membership of the CopWatch Coalition. General meetings will be held every month. Decisions at this general meeting are made by a minimum two-thirds majority vote. Anyone can bring proposals. Anyone who agrees with the basic goals and strategy of the CopWatch Coalition is able to be a member and vote. Individuals representing groups vote as individuals, if they want a proposal passed, they should stack the meeting.

All major decisions, such as new policies and major actions are the sole reserve of the membership. The steering should work with the two organizers to implement these decisions of the membership. Their role is executive, to execute. They also have the responsibility to make suggestions and help draft proposals and generally ensure that the meeting proceeds smoothly.

What is the strategy of the CopWatch Coalition?

The CopWatch Coalition will use a combination of legalistic and mass action tactics in order to render justice to victims of police brutality and to challenge the policing policies that support it.

By using legalistic tactics such as filing police complaints, civil suits, going to small claims court, and petitioning the Attorney General to file charges etc., attention can be brought, through the media, to both the scope and rate of police violence and to the ineffectiveness of normal channels of recourse. Legalistic tactics serve to both challenge the targeted institutions to live up to their own mandates, as well as justify our use of direct action tactics if they do not do so. Also, by taking advantage of the legalistic channels available to us, we can deter individual police officers from abusing their power by demonstrating that we will hold them accountable for their actions, through whatever legal means are necessary. These tactics are our first level of escalation, setting the stage for mass-action.

The role of mass-action tactics are to disrupt policing institutions and the bureaucracies that administer them. These disruptions must carry a credible threat of continuation and escalation so as to create the conditions where it costs less politically, in terms of public confidence and the smooth functioning of their bureaucracies, to grant concessions than to repress or ignore us. Mass actions generate public sympathy by dramatizing the justice of our case, and showing that substantial opposition exists. This is our biggest single weapon against police brutality, as the police rely enormously on public confidence to carry out their work. Without it, people would become uncooperative and distrust police intrusions into their lives and activities. A lack of public acquiescence would generate political pressures that would mobilize elites to "reform" police

institutions, in an effort to regain their confidence, i.e. fire chief constables and senior bureaucrats, threaten inquiries, expose their affairs to public scrutiny, possibly curtail police powers, and certainly disrupt their lives and threaten their employment. Mass-actions tactics include occupations, rallies, marches, city-wide postering campaigns, etc.

Why a CopWatch?

Due to the "development" of Vancouver East (including the Downtown Eastside and East Vancouver) over the past several years, we have witnessed an increasing level of police harassment and brutality in these areas. Through the guise of "Community Policing", police have been helping to organize, and set priorities for, homeowner's and business improvement associations. This collusion has resulted in the demand from "communities" for policing solutions to social problems such as poverty and drug addiction.

Thus, public funds are being funneled to refurbish Vancouver's "War on Drugs" and to sweep the streets of "undesirables". The justification for this spending... "public safety". Those most displaced by this mal-development - street youth, drug users, street workers, pan-handlers, squeegeers, immigrants, refugees, Natives, and people with mental and physical disabilities - have been the targets for this new onslaught of policing. As the current police complaints process does very little to ensure police accountability, we must develop our own system for protecting our civil liberties. This is why we need a CopWatch.

What would CopWatch do?

1. REDUCE POLICE VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

(A) Directly observe the police on the street.

- ★ Walk in pairs, or groups of four; stop, watch, and document police incidents.
- ★ Identify police - name, badge number, department, car license.
- ★ Record on audio or video tape, and/or take pictures.
- ★ Write detailed report describing the incident.
- ★ Collect witness statements.

(B) Follow up with public pressure in legal proceedings.

- ★ Support brutality victims in defense of false charges.
- ★ Encourage people to file complaints with police complaints commission, and small claims court suits against offending officers.

- ★ Help people find lawyers to file civil or criminal suits.
- ★ Apply pressure to stop discriminatory legislation and policies that increase police powers over people's civil and human rights.

2. EMPOWER AND UNITE THE COMMUNITY BY LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER.

- (A) Educate community about their rights**
Distribute literature with legal information re: police policy and civil rights.
- (B) Expand community support for victims of police crimes.**
Publicize incidents of abuse with offending officer's photos in the COPWATCH Report, local press, and posters for "Shame the Cops Campaign".
- (C) Encourage people to exercise their right to observe the police.**
Mobilize crowds when incidents are going down, distribute CopWatch brochures.
- (D) Mobilize community to protest injustices through marches, rallies, and other demonstrations of our commitment and concern.**
- (E) Gather intelligence about offending officers for community "police line-ups".**

What resources are needed?

- ★ two cell phones, two video cameras, one or two regular cameras, lawyers, office space, CopWatch identifying badges/shirts/patches, photocopying, computer and printer, paper, postering materials

How can people get involved?

- ★ We need CopWatchers, researchers, writers, publishers, people with office skills, artists, people with good listening skills to answer the hotline, and people well versed in the law. **Contact: 683-7123.**

AGENDA FOR Saturday January 8th MEETING

- ★ Amendments to the proposal.
- ★ Developing Agenda for the next meeting, on January 16th.
- ★ Outreach for the 16th.
- ★ Develop a timeline for CopWatch.

Next Meeting: Sunday January 16th

Meeting will be held at the VANDU office, 163 West Hastings Street at 1pm.