

West Van police dog attacks innocent youth

Exercise goes wrong at WV Community Centre

James Weldon

North Shore News

Friday, March 19, 2010

West Vancouver Police Department is reviewing its canine training after a police dog attacked a youth during an exercise at West Vancouver Community Centre.

The dog, its handler and a volunteer were practising tracking outside the Marine Drive facility at about 11 p.m. March 9 when the animal came upon two young people seated on a bench, lunged at one of them and bit the victim on the shoulder.

"The dog contacted the back and then took hold of the jacket sleeve and the upper left arm of the youth in its mouth," said Const. Jeff Palmer, a spokesman for the WVPD. "It was immediately commanded to release. The contact was very brief."



CREDIT: NEWS photo Mike Wakefield
WVPD spokesman Const. Jeff Plamer addresses media during a press conference Thursday morning.

The victim was left with abrasions and bruising but no puncture wounds, according to Palmer. B.C. Ambulance Service paramedics checked out the injuries and released the youth on scene.

The WVPD has since suspended the dog from service and entered it into a provincial recertification program. The handler and the department's three other canine units are still on the job, but management is revisiting its approach to training the animals.

"We want . . . to ensure that when training is conducted, it is conducted in a way that doesn't endanger members of the public," said Palmer.

The dog team involved in Sunday's incident was running an exercise in which a volunteer runs ahead and the animal is then told to track that person down. The officer thought the space was deserted at the time, according to the WVPD.

"It was a low-lit area," said Palmer. "The police service dog handler didn't notice the youths. . . . Basically, the police dog will react to what it encounters in a circumstance like that."

The WVPD didn't initially publicize the incident in part because the victim wanted it that way, said Palmer. "We were prepared to respect that wish," he said. "Someone who knows the youth made it known to a media outlet without the consent of the youth."

The Province's Sam Cooper published a story about the attack Wednesday afternoon, eight days after the incident and about two hours before the WVPD issued a release.

Palmer said the force has made a formal apology to the victim and the victim's family. It will not be releasing the names of the officer, the dog or the youth involved, he said.

© North Shore News 2010

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2010 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.