



WINNipeg POLICE SERVICE

REPORT TO THE WINNipeg POLICE BOARD

TO: Chair, Winnipeg Police Board

FROM: Chief Danny G. Smyth

SUBJECT: 2023 Criminal Flight Pursuits and Armoured Rescue Vehicle Operations Report

DATE: May 24, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

That this report be received as information by the Winnipeg Police Board.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications within this report.

BACKGROUND

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) standards require written procedures for conducting criminal flight pursuits. These include guidelines for pursuit termination, supervisory and dispatcher responsibilities, and administrative oversight for each pursuit. CALEA also stipulates regular training for officers and an annual evaluation of policy and operational outcomes.

Every year, the Service compiles a report on criminal flight pursuits and a summary of Armoured Rescue Vehicle (ARV) operations. This report is provided to the Winnipeg Police Board and the public for information, context and transparency.

DISCUSSION

Criminal flight pursuits occur when officers attempt to stop a vehicle and the driver refuses, prompting pursuit to stop or identify the vehicle. Pursuits are considered a last resort due to safety risks for the public, officers, and suspects. A pursuit may be justified if the suspect's escape poses a threat to human life or can cause serious injury.

Winnipeg Police Service policies align with CALEA standards, outlining conditions for initiating and terminating pursuits. The procedures also suggest alternatives, such as requesting aerial support, and mandate risk assessment before and during pursuits.

After each pursuit, officers and supervisors must submit reports to the Police Vehicle Operations Program Manager (PVOPM), with potential review by the Pursuit Review Board (PRB). This oversight ensures accountability and identifies training needs or procedural updates.

Pursuits resulting in serious injury or death are investigated by the Independent Investigation Unit of Manitoba (IIU). In 2023, one pursuit was referred directly to the IIU.

The Police Vehicle Operations Program (PVOP) trains officers in theoretical and practical police vehicle operations, including driving dynamics, pursuit tactics, and risk assessment. Recertification every two years ensures officers stay current with safety practices and procedures.

2023 PURSUIT RESULTS

In 2023, the Winnipeg Police Service reported 66 pursuits, a 16% decrease from the prior year. The reduction in pursuits continues a year over year trend since the policy and procedure was updated in 2019. The past four years of continued training, information sharing and reinforcement has impacted the number of pursuits annually.

Pursuits Summary ¹	2020		2021		2022		2023	
Criminal Flight Pursuits	122		91		79		66	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Pursuits aborted	62	51%	42	46%	48	61%	46	70%
Forcible stop attempted	81	66%	48	53%	50	63%	30	46%
Reason Initiated:								
Criminal Code Offences	88	72%	70	77%	66	84%	53	80%
Traffic/HTA Offences	34	28%	21	23%	13	17%	13	20%
Outcomes:								
Arrest events	57	48%	40	44%	27	34%	20	30%
Collision events	41	34%	22	24%	13	17%	9	14%
Injury events	15	12%	8	9%	4	5%	2	3%
Reviewed by Pursuit Review Board	11	9%	7	8%	4	5%	4	6%

* Review of reports and classifications is an on-going process and may result in minor variations over time.

In 2023, the Service aborted 46 out of the 66 reported pursuits (70%). This 9% rate increase from the previous year indicates members more often assessed the pursuit as posing a higher risk to public safety than apprehending the suspect. Forceable stopping techniques, such as using a stop stick or implementing a containment stop was attempted in 30 of the 66 reported pursuits (46%).

REASON INITIATED

According to WPS policy, members will only initiate a pursuit for a known *Criminal Code* or *Controlled Drug and Substances Act* offence, considering the seriousness of the offence. Consistent with previous years, pursuits were initiated by members 80% of the time due to *Criminal Code* offences.

In 2023, 30 of the 66 pursuits (46%) involved stolen vehicles.

Year	Stolen Vehicles	%
2020	35	29%
2021	38	42%
2022	38	48%
2023	30	46%

¹ In 2019, the PVOPM reviewed and modified the pursuit classification process, altering the reporting system. Consequently, data collected before 2020 is no longer comparable due to these changes in pursuit classification.

OUTCOMES

The safe apprehension and arrest of a suspect is the preferable outcome to any pursuit event. In 2023, 20 out of the 66 pursuits resulted in an arrest (30%). This rate is slightly lower than the prior year, but meets expectations given the upward trend of aborting pursuits.

Continuing the downward trend, there were 9 pursuits that involved a motor vehicle collision in 2023.

Collision Classification	2020	2021	2022	2023
Suspect vehicle with Police vehicle or multiple vehicles	14	10	4	4
Suspect vehicle with third-party vehicle or multiple vehicles	9	2	4	3
Suspect vehicle with Police and third-party vehicle	2	0	0	0
Suspect vehicle with fixed or temporary object	13	10	4	2
Police vehicle with suspect vehicle	1	0	0	0
Police vehicle with fixed or temporary object	2	0	1	0

*Review of reports and classifications is an on-going process which may result in minor variations over time.

Continuing the downward trend, there were 5 individuals injured in 3% of pursuit events in 2023.

Injuries	2020	2021	2022	2023
Pursuits	122	91	79	66
Injury Rate	12%	9%	5%	3%
Injured Officers	12	2	0	2
Injured Suspects	16	7	3	1
Injured Third-Parties	1	1	3	2

The post-pursuit file review evaluates all involved members based on the circumstances of each pursuit. Officers with high overall compliance are categorized as "Compliant". Those with minor procedural concerns fall under "Supervisory Review" and receive coaching and feedback from a supervisor to address issues. Non-compliant incidents are escalated to the Pursuit Review Board (PRB) for further action. In 2023, 4 out of 66 pursuits were referred to the PRB for review.

In 2021, PVOPM developed an online e-learning pursuit module to supplement recruit training. The PVOP continually refines training to mitigate liability associated with police pursuits.

In May of 2022, the definition of a police pursuit was clarified with added detail to specify the necessary elements for an event to be classified as a pursuit.

FLIGHT OPERATIONS UNIT (AIR1)

Since 2011, the Flight Operations Unit helicopter (AIR1) has been an invaluable asset to the operational and investigative services of the WPS. AIR1 can travel from one side of the city to the other in a matter of minutes. The onboard equipment allows aircrews to get “eyes” on an active high-risk event almost instantaneously from distances as far as 10-15 kilometres away².

During pursuits, AIR1’s objective is to acquire visual containment of the suspect’s vehicle. Once achieved, AIR1 coordinates ground units to disengage from the pursuit, substantially reducing the risks associated with a pursuit event. AIR1 continues monitoring the suspect until they stop and exit the vehicle, allowing ground units to safely make the arrest.

AIR1 is budgeted for 1,000 flight hours per year, or approximately 11% of operational hours. In 2023, AIR1 was involved in 12 out of 66 reported pursuits (18%). Visual containment was achieved in 8 out of these 12 pursuits (67%), contributing to an overall increase in pursuit arrest rates from 26% without AIR1 to 50% with AIR1. Importantly, pursuit events involving AIR1 did not result in injuries to officers, suspects or third parties.

For further details on AIR1’s capabilities and its effectiveness as an alternative pursuit resource, refer to the [Flight Operations Unit’s Annual Operational Report](#).

ARMOURED RESCUE VEHICLE

Acquired in 2015, the ARV is a tool used to ensure that Service members have the appropriate equipment when dealing with potentially volatile and violent situations. During tactical deployments, the ARV primarily functions as a protected rescue vehicle, safely transporting Tactical Support Team members to and from high-risk environments and extracting injured officers or citizens to safety.

ARV Deployment

In 2023, the ARV was deployed 76 times for tactical operations. These included 57 planned events for *Criminal Code* search warrants related to firearms, murder investigations, and one hostage situation. Additionally, there were 19 unplanned events, with 16 involving suspected firearms.

Community Engagement

Throughout 2023, the ARV participated in 16 public engagements, including community requests and notable events like the Santa Claus Parade, Kids in Kare Picnic at the Forks, and various activities during the World Police & Fire Games.

Training

The Criminal Property Forfeiture funding enabled the WPS Tactical Support Team to host a 2-day Tactical Armoured Vehicle Operations Course. A total of 24 police members from the WPS, RCMP, Brandon, Winkler, Morden and Altona police services participated in this training.

Danny G. Smyth
Chief of Police

² <https://winnipegpolice.substack.com/p/air-1-helicopter-flight-operations>