

OPP actively enforcing Emergency Act during COVID-19

April 23, 2020 By Michael RileyLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Ontario Provincial Police in Bancroft has seen an influx of enforcement calls since the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act was put into place by the provincial government to blunt the effects of COVID-19 last month.

While the OPP are busy serving and protecting the community in the best of times, enforcing the Emergency Act has added a new, more difficult facet to their duties in these uncertain times. In addition to enforcing the act, they need to engage with and inform people who are scared, panicking and even sick with the virus.

The reported cases of COVID-19 in Ontario on Tuesday, April 14, were 483, bringing the total to 7,953 confirmed cases. Unfortunately, that number rises daily. Hospitalizations have occurred in 763 cases, and 360 have died so far. Resolved cases come to 3,568. The provincial government recently extended the Emergency Act for another 28 days to stop and prevent further spread of the virus.

Provincial mandates for physical distancing and the closure of non-essential businesses are being followed by many, but some people and businesses are not cooperating.

Bill Dickson, OPP media relations officer for the East region, says they receive numerous calls each day for issues related to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

"Most deal with people reporting gatherings of more than five people," he says. "While we have been receiving calls and responding to these incidents, there have been no related charges laid in the Bancroft area. In these cases, officers focus on ensuring that members of the public are aware of the rules."

Those rules are to remain physically distant by at least six feet (two metres), not to congregate in groups of more than five people, preventing price gouging on necessary goods to fight COVID-19 and for all non-essential businesses to remain closed to walk-in guests. Takeout, delivery and curbside pickup are permitted while following distancing guidelines and sanitary protocols. New measures were also introduced to address retirement home surge capacity, restrict recreational camping on Crown land and to allow the repurposing of existing buildings and temporary structures.

"During the COVID-19 situation, people can contact the OPP to report those not following the rules related to physical distancing, including gatherings of more than five people," says Dickson. "The OPP will also respond to concerns about businesses remaining open, even though they have not been identified as essential by the provincial government."

If charged with a breach of the Emergency Act, people must now identify themselves to police or face a fine of \$750 for failing to do so, a fine of \$1,000 will be incurred if obstructing a provincial offences officer from issuing a ticket, and failing to comply with an emergency order carries a fine of up to \$100,000 and a year in jail for an individual, \$500,000 for a director of a corporation or \$10 million for a corporation itself.

"We encourage everyone to abide by temporary regulations," says Dickson. "Laying charges is our last option."