

'Project Sleepwalker': 22 arrests, 226 charges, millions in seized drugs, guns and cars

BY MEGHAN HURLEY, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN DECEMBER 9, 2011



Police seized 13 vehicles, two homes in Ottawa and one in Toronto, large amounts of cash, jewelry and precious metals in the form of gold and silver. Firearms seized included hunting rifles, a knock-off AK 47, a military-grade assault rifle, a Tech-9 sub-machine gun, revolvers and pistols.

Photograph by: BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

OTTAWA — What began as a street-level investigation culminated this week in one of the largest drug busts in the history of the Ottawa Police Service.

"This is probably one of the most important drug investigations in Ottawa over the past 20 years," Ottawa police Chief Vern White said during a press conference Thursday at the Elgin Street police station.

A crime ring, allegedly led by Ottawa's Ahmad Rezai, 32, was responsible for trafficking large quantities of drugs from Toronto to the Ottawa area.

The 18-month undercover operation, dubbed Project Sleepwalker, resulted in the seizure of \$2.7 million worth of cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana and ecstasy.

Police arrested 22 people and laid 226 charges that stemmed from raids conducted between Dec. 5 and Dec. 7.

Those arrested face charges of drug possession and trafficking, conspiracy to commit an indictable offence, possession of proceeds of crime and possession of restricted or prohibited weapons.

Police also seized \$2.5 million worth of property obtained by crime. That included 13 vehicles, two homes in Ottawa and one in Toronto, large amounts of cash, jewelry and precious metals in the form of gold and silver.

An arsenal of weapons seized was on display at the media briefing Thursday afternoon. The firearms seized included hunting rifles, a knock-off AK 47, a military-grade assault rifle, a Tec-9 sub-machine gun, revolvers and pistols.

A proceeds of crime investigation will continue with the goal of dismantling "illegal enterprises," said RCMP Assistant Commissioner Francois Bidal.

The investigation began after police received complaints from Vanier residents who were concerned about drug dealing in the area.

"The successful operation is an example of the community making the right call," White said.

That's when the street crime unit began an investigation, which involved street-level drug buys, Staff Sgt. Kal Ghadban said.

The case began to grow as undercover officers bought larger and larger amounts of drugs.

Soon, the drug section under the supervision of Staff Sgt. Mike Laviolette took over the investigation to allow the street crime unit to continue other investigations. Officers infiltrated the crime group and began to buy even larger quantities of drugs.

Police believe the amount of drugs seized in this 18-month investigation will make a significant dent in what is hitting Ottawa's streets.

"The impact that this has on the community is relatively large, specifically with heroin and methamphetamine," Laviolette said. "For us to be able to dismantle this organization and stop them from importing heroin from another city is huge."

Roughly 220 Ottawa police, RCMP, OPP and Toronto police officers were involved in the investigation.

"Collaborative, intelligence-led policing is the key to solving crime," said OPP Insp. Jeroen Meinen of the organized crime enforcement bureau. "Policing partners working together increase our resources and this increases investigative results."

Police executed search warrants at 16 locations in Ottawa, three in the Almonte area and one in Toronto.

One search warrant was executed Monday night on Seguin Street, a quiet residential street in Ottawa's east end.

A neighbour, who doesn't want to be identified, said she saw the flashing lights of police cars near her house. When she looked out the window, she saw heavily armed tactical officers.

The woman said the police did not have their sirens on when they arrived on the street.

"We have never seen anything like this," the woman said. "This is not somewhere where you see syringes on the streets or anything like that."

The president of the Vanier Community Association said this week's raids showed that ordinary residents could help cut down on illegal activity by reporting what they saw to the police.

"We're hoping that this announcement (Thursday) will actually encourage residents who have hitherto been reluctant or even unaware that, yes, they do have a means of contributing and to making the community a better place to live," Jevone Nicholas said.

Project Sleepwalker is the second major drug bust by Ottawa police in recent months.

An exhaustive police probe ended in September with the arrest of Hells Angels gang member Michael Clairoux and 11 of his associates.

The investigation began after the outlaw crew allegedly tried to expand its drug turf with violence on the streets of Ottawa, delivering severe public beatings to criminal rivals.

The Hells Angels "large scale" drug trafficking operation, allegedly led by Clairoux, brought in as much as \$400,000 a month, police said in September.

Surveillance teams on Project Finale helped identify members of the criminal organization that was believed to be responsible for distribution of marijuana and cocaine in Ottawa.

With files from Mark Brownlee

mhurley@ottawacitizen.com

twitter.com/meghan_hurley

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



Police seized 13 vehicles, two homes in Ottawa and one in Toronto, large amounts of cash, jewelry and precious metals in the form of gold and silver. Firearms seized included hunting rifles, a knock-off AK 47, a military-grade assault rifle, a Tech-9 sub-machine gun, revolvers and pistols.

Photograph by: BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

