

Some decisions are not easy...

We are all feeling the pinch of rising costs for consumer goods and services. These increased costs affect everyone from retail shoppers and business owners, to nearly every manufacturing industry nationwide, including transportation and construction maintenance.

In 1998, operating and maintenance expenses of our Expressway System reached \$8.2 million. Today, that number has jumped to more than \$12.9 million, a 56 percent increase. Revenues have increased just 30 percent. Over this same 10-year period, we have invested more than \$60 million in significant improvements in the System. Some of those improvements include the implementation of electronic toll collection (now called E-ZPass), widening of the Powhite Parkway roadway, application of asphalt overlays on a majority of the RMA's 45 lane miles, as well as other routine facility maintenance items.

Over the next 10 years, it is estimated that maintenance costs will climb to \$80 million. Since our last toll increase a decade ago, we have done our best to absorb the rising costs of steel, asphalt and concrete, instead of passing them along to you. We are constantly reviewing our internal controls of RMA policies and procedures to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Now, we are faced with the decision to increase the price of tolls for all two-axle vehicles to 70 cents, beginning September 8, in an effort to maintain the high level of service our customers have come to expect along the Powhite Parkway and Downtown Expressway. We want to assure you that the revenue from the upcoming toll increase will go directly towards operating and maintaining the Expressway System.

We appreciate your decision to ride with us.



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Stalking 101

By Susan Nienow

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Stalking arrests show up on the police department's daily crime log all too often. In 2007, there were 53 males and 10 females arrested for stalking in Chesterfield County. Often, these arrests were in tandem with other domestic violence-related charges. Nationally, 81 percent of victims who were stalked by an intimate partner said they had also been physically assaulted by that partner.

One out of every 12 women and one out of 45 men are stalked in their lifetime. A man who is stalked is often reluctant to go to the police and say a woman is stalking him, so the stalking rate against men could be much higher.

Stalking is defined as "a pattern of behavior directed at a person that causes a reasonable person to be in fear," and often occurs after an intimate relationship between two parties has ended.

Men are the most frequent perpetrators. Ninety-four percent of female victims and 60 percent of male victims were stalked by men. When the stalker is an intimate partner, he is more likely to use a weapon, to re-offend and to escalate the stalking behaviors quickly.

Stalking behaviors

The stalker may follow the victim, make threatening or harassing phone calls, or send unwanted communication in the form of letters, cards, e-mails or instant messages. He may threaten family members or a new partner of the victim. Usually these behaviors are not reported to the police.

Offenders typically have above-average intelligence and dependent and/or controlling personalities. They may also suffer from personality disorders: narcissistic, antisocial and/or borderline. They may commit other crimes.

Victims are more at risk if there has been past physical violence, threats or an escalation in acts.

Victims should also consider if the stalker has a prior history of stalking behavior, violating protective orders or committing other criminal offenses. If the suspect is preoccupied with suicide or homicide, has weapons available or is abusing drugs or alcohol, the risk for violence is even higher.

The law

Stalking is a Class 1 misdemeanor and punishable by no more than one year in jail and a \$2,500 fine. A third or subsequent conviction that occurs within five years of a conviction for this or a similar offense is a Class 6 felony. For specifics, see the Code of Virginia, 18.2-60.3.

"It is a challenge to try these [cases] because the evidence is limited to that time or place. Bringing up past abuse is decided case by case," said Chesterfield County Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney B.J. McGee. "There is a high threshold of proof."

The acts may occur in multiple jurisdictions, so it may be hard to see the whole picture. The stalker doesn't want witnesses and may be careful not to leave evidence.

A person may be charged with stalking in any Virginia jurisdiction as long as the stalking occurred at least once in that jurisdiction, explains Beth Smyers, Chesterfield County Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney

If you are being stalked

Anyone who is being stalked should contact the police to report incidents and then go to a magistrate and try to get a 48-hour emergency protective order and a court date. Once an

emergency protective order is issued, the victim must then go before a judge for a temporary protective order. Permanent protective orders are also issued by a judge and are for two years.

Report all incidents of stalking – even incidents where you are unsure if the stalker is involved – to the police so they are documented, recommended Sgt. Ed Wessel of the Chesterfield Police Department. Sometimes bizarre incidents that seem harmless may actually be the work of the stalker. For additional help, contact a victim advocate from



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People sometimes stalk their ex-partners after the ending of a relationship. The most frequent perpetrators are men.

the Victim Witness Assistance Program at 796-7087.

More tips for victims

- Keep a journal of all stalking activity and who witnessed it. Save anything the stalker leaves for you or sends to you. Screen all calls. If the stalker leaves a message, save it for the police or your advocate.

- Do not contact or respond to your stalker in any way. A stalker acts out of a need for control and power. Any conversation or interaction with the stalker encourages his/her stalking behavior.

- Friends, co-workers and family may have to be notified, but should not directly intervene.

- Provide a photo of the offender and a copy of the protective order to a supervisor or the security department at work.

- Change the locks, add deadbolts and update lighting at home. Notify schools and childcare if you have children. Be aware of your surroundings and keep your cell phone charged and with you at all times.

- The victim may have to move, get an unlisted number while keeping the old to gather evidence, and change routines.

For more information on stalking, the law and abuse, call the Domestic Violence Resource Center at 768-4783.