

**Overview:**

The recent escalation in crime and violence in our communities has reached a crisis point. Many community members are afraid for themselves, their families and of the deterioration of their neighbourhoods as safe places to live, work and play. That fear is evidenced in the business community by employees being afraid of being assaulted in and around their job locations and customers becoming increasingly nervous over venturing into certain commercial areas. The dramatic increase in the cost of security and absorbing costs of theft have resulted in businesses in jeopardy of closure, as some in fact have done, and in a significant increase in the cost of living for every family in British Columbia as prices of goods and services are increased in an attempt to recover those costs.

SOS Coalition evolution:

Community leaders from communities and businesses have been expressing concern over the threats of crime and violence in their communities for years. Governments at all levels have responded in various ways to specific aspects of the problem but the conditions have worsened in many if not most circumstances. Community groups have become engaged in various forms and have resulted in the realization that a province-wide, non-partisan movement is required to raise awareness of the issues and their cost to families and the community in a manner that makes this suite of issues an election priority in the next election cycle. The SOS Save Our Streets coalition represents that movement with concerned citizen groups and businesses from throughout BC. An Oversight Council has been established consisting of London Drugs President and COO, Clint Mahlman, as Chair; Karen Kuwica, Director, Nanaimo Areas Public Safety Association; Linda Annis, Executive Director, Crimestoppers of Metro Vancouver; Jeff Bray, President, BIA BC; Ian Tostenson, President/CEO, BC Restaurants and Food Services Association and Darrell Jones, President, Save On Foods. Also established are Working Groups addressing Research, Communications and Government Relations.

Founding Members:

Metro Vancouver Crimestoppers; Nanaimo Area Public Safety Association; Clean Streets Penticton; Citizens Take Action (Dawson Creek/Ft. St. John); London Drugs; Marquis Wine; Save On Foods/Pattison Food Group; 7-Eleven Canada; Bay Centre Victoria; Safer Vancouver; Restaurants Canada; Downtown Victoria Business Association; Georgia Main Food Group; Convenience Industry Council of Canada; Save Our City Vancouver; Greater Vancouver Board of Trade; Surrey Board of Trade; MEC; Sobey's; Purdy's Chocolatier; Clean Up V9L (Duncan); Retail Council of Canada; Nelson Neighbourhood Network; Lululemon; Aritzia; Rexall; MEC; Pacific Reach Properties; Kamloops Citizens for Change; Sequirguard, Chilliwack Beware Crime and Safety.

While these entities have shared concerns over crime and violence in their communities it is appreciated that participating with SOS does not preclude organizations from pursuing individual projects and goals. Establishing safer communities is the shared objective and all such groups are welcome.

Approach:

SOS is not being prescriptive in demanding specific actions from government other than to fulfill their responsibility in addressing the entire suite of issues that have resulted in the current levels of crime and violence and fear. Government has the knowledge of the issues, the financial and people resources, legislative authority, and responsibility to fix the issues. SOS will conduct research on the costs of the issues to the public, to government and to business and will publicize the results and incidents along with statistical evidence as to whether or not government actions are having the desired effect.

Key Messages:

1. SOS is an internationally recognized signal of distress and a cry for help. Our coalition of concerned citizen groups and business from throughout BC is dedicated to delivering that message. The issues are well known and while words matter, now is the time for solutions.
2. Escalating crime and violence are resulting in people being injured, families being afraid of neighbourhoods, employees in fear of going to work, businesses being forced to close, family supporting jobs lost and in some cases, downtowns becoming ghost towns.
3. The skyrocketing security and theft costs for business result in the viability of businesses being threatened, businesses closing and family supporting jobs lost but also an estimated \$500 per year increase in the cost of living for the average BC family.
4. To often the “Wack A Mole” approach is adopted with attention and resources being spent on addressing individual aspects of the issues (decriminalization; police resources; safe supply; homelessness; mental health services; judicial reform, etc.) when a comprehensive, cross government jurisdiction approach is required.
5. There is a close relationship between many of the issues. Much of the retail crime today is conducted by individuals attempting to support illicit drug habits but being “managed” by organized crime groups. Violence on the street and in business locales is often linked to mental health issues and illicit drug addictions. Lack of police, mental health, drug addiction, prosecutorial and judicial resources all have a role in the solution.
6. Theft, vandalism, and violent crimes are often committed by the same person over and over again. With a perceived lack of appropriate deterrent from our justice system criminals feel free to repeat the crimes many times without serious consequence.
7. It is time for government to accept and respond to their responsibilities.
8. We call on government to implement innovative, aggressive and comprehensive solutions now.
9. SOS will establish a set of benchmarks that are credible and by which success or lack thereof in responding to the issues can be measured.
10. SOS and its supporters stand ready to collaborate in any meaningful action and while words matter, success will be measured on results.