

# Abbotsford courthouse has limitations

By [Neil Corbett - Abbotsford News](#)

Most of the pressures at the Abbotsford courthouse are the result of the physical limitations of the building, say officials in the system.

The current courthouse has five court rooms, four of which are designed to handle prisoners securely. “We’re one of the smaller courthouses in the province,” said Crown prosecutor Scott Quendack, adding that it is also one of the oldest in the Lower Mainland.

He said the courthouse is not as secure for the movement of prisoners as more modern facilities. In Surrey, for example, the courthouse, pretrial centre and RCMP detachment are all in close proximity, and prisoners are moved via an underground tunnel.

Samiran Lakshman, president of the B.C. Crown Counsel Association, said the Abbotsford courthouse is simply not suitable for trials where there is a significant security risk, such as those involving organized crime.

“Wherever there’s a significant security concern, things get moved to Surrey.” That is far from ideal, because Surrey is already the courthouse most plagued by delay issues in B.C., he noted.

Lakshman said the delay for a typical, one-day trial, where the accused is not in custody, is 12 months in Abbotsford. This is considered acceptable, especially compared with the 15-18 months in Surrey. In Abbotsford, he said, criminal cases are generally not dismissed because of lengthy delays. But because court time is at a premium, a courtroom will be scheduled for 14 to 16 hours per day, to ensure the court time is still well used if matters are adjourned or delayed.

Court generally sits for only five hours per day, and Lakshman said when there are more cases to be heard than there is time, “plea bargains start happening.”