

## B.C. law courts full of gang trials, but anti-gang police few and far between

Vancouver Sun  
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October 24, 2012

Even though several gang trials are being held simultaneously in B.C. Supreme Court, anti-gang police have cut back their presence at the Vancouver Law Courts.

Sgt. Lindsey Houghton of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit said Tuesday that members of its uniformed team who were bolstering security at the Vancouver courts have been asked to stay away.

“Our overt uniformed presence has been reduced at the request of the courts and the judiciary since last year. You’d have to ask them why that is,” Houghton said.

He said sheriffs are looking after court security.

“The B.C. Sheriffs have a robust presence there and have the ability to monitor and respond to anything in the court facility as is part of their mandate,” Houghton said.

“We are well aware of the trials and appearances that are currently taking place.”

No one from B.C. Court Services responded to requests for information about the change.

A year ago, when gangster Sukh Dhak had a bail hearing at the Vancouver Law Courts, heavily armed members of the gang task force patrolled throughout the building.

On Tuesday, as Dhak’s drug conspiracy case continued with pre-trial motions, there was no visible police presence.

In fact, at a break in the proceedings, Dhak sat in on a manslaughter case a floor below his own trial, chatting for several minutes at the morning break with one of the accused, Patrick Avery Plowman, before shaking his hand and heading back to his own case.

Dhak was the subject of a police warning in September 2011 during heightened gang tensions. Police said anyone associating with members of the Dhak-Duhre group could be at risk.

The trial for Dhak and his co-accused Baljit Pabla and Neville Rankin is expected to begin this week, but last-minute pre-trial applications are being heard now.

All three accused appeared in the high-security courtroom built for the United Nations gang murder conspiracy case, which is also in pre-trial motions but not sitting this week.

Next door, in courtroom 66, is the murder trial of Michael Bruce Newman, a UN gangster charged with killing Marc Rozen in 2004. Rozen, a lawyer who had given up his practice to work with troubled kids, was stabbed and shot to death in his West End condo after advertising an expensive engagement ring.

And next door to Newman, the murder trial of Dinh Cuong Pham is continuing before a jury. Pham is charged with shooting Em Van Huynh to death outside Vancouver’s Hai Lua restaurant in July 2008. Jurors have heard the tiny pho house at Nanaimo and Broadway was frequented by gangsters.

Plowman and his co-accused — Sebastian Lucas Miazga, Kalum Lather Cain and Nolan Swallow — are on trial a floor below in the Feb. 1, 2009 slaying of Tyson Edwards outside Richards on Richards nightclub.

Members of the public must pass through security gates to be searched by sheriffs for some of the gang trials at the Vancouver Law Courts. But other courtrooms can be entered without any search.

Dean Purdy of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, which represents sheriffs, said he is concerned if there are few anti-gang police specialists supporting the work of sheriffs at the Vancouver Law Courts.

“I have been informed that the police presence has dropped off and that’s a concern for us because the police and the sheriffs work hand in hand to provide a safe environment at the law courts,” Purdy said.