B.C. officials promise to do more to fight auto crime:

In the final instalment of our seven-part series on B.C.'s plague of auto crime, David Carrigg asks authorities what they plan to do about it, and The Province offers its own 10-point solution

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Authorities have promised to act on B.C.'s deadly auto-theft crisis in the wake of a Province investigation.

"There's no doubt this is a very serious issue," said Solicitor- General John Les. "Especially concerning is that what's driving the crisis is drug abuse."

Over the past week, The Province has examined the auto-theft scourge -- responsible for 11 deaths so far this year -- put the spotlight on the justice system and shown readers how to better protect their vehicles.

"You've done a great job of highlighting the problem. I think the public's concern is being felt now," said Attorney-General Wally Oppal.

Last year, almost 40,000 vehicles were stolen in B.C. Here's what authorities are going to do about it:

- Within two weeks, the successful bait-car program will be expanded into the Okanagan and Kootenays, two areas recently hit by a surge in auto theft.
- On Oct. 12, the province's Street Crime Working Group will reveal a community court model aimed at rehabilitating, not just jailing, repeat auto criminals and other thieves.
- The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority will create court liaison workers as part of its soon-to-be unveiled Urgent Response Team. These workers will attend court and outline to the judge the accused's mental health and addiction problems.
- The solicitor-general has committed to buying as many automatic licence-plate recognition systems as possible within the next two years.
- ICBC has revealed it is working on a program that will provide support for target groups to buy immobilizers, considered an owner's best weapon against auto crime.
- Next month, Attorney- General Oppal will discuss increasing the maximum sentence for auto theft during a meeting with the federal justice minister.
- In the wake of disturbing revelations that dangerous serial auto thief Robert Osborne is refusing drug treatment in jail, Les and Oppal have promised to examine compulsory drug treatment for chronic criminals.

"Using Osborne as an example, if there's a refusal to take the required treatment to get off the drug addiction, then I think there ought to be a mechanism that makes a sentence somewhat more indefinite," Les told The Province on Friday.

"If they take their treatment and better themselves as a result, that will make them more likely to be released sooner. You need to put the length of the sentence in the hands of the prisoner."

Les said he has discussed the concept with federal and provincial counterparts and has received strong support.

"What is the point of turning Robert Osborne loose when he has served his sentence if he is no better coming out than when he went in?"

Oppal said creating mandatory treatment is not an "unrealistic solution."

"If a person is a chronic offender and is addicted to some substance, we should put them in a treatment facility if that person does not voluntarily submit to some kind of therapy to prevent future conduct of a similar nature. We could do that under the Mental Health Act or through a diversionary program. There's a number of ways to do that, as long as there is a public will to do it."

Federal MPs are presently examining whether the Criminal Code of Canada should be amended to force treatment on crystal meth-addicted criminals as part of conditional sentence reforms.

Earlier this year, Alberta politicians backed a law allowing parents and guardians to seek mandatory treatment orders for their addicted children.

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