



# Vermont Crime Information Center

Department of Public Safety - Division of Criminal Justice Services

## 2004 Vermont Crime Report

### Introduction

The 2004 edition of the Vermont Crime Report contains an analysis of crime reported to law enforcement agencies throughout the State of Vermont during calendar year 2004. Crimes reported to state police, game wardens, municipal police, sheriff departments, and other state law enforcement agencies are contained in this report. Crime statistics are arranged statewide, by county, and by town.

### VERMONT CRIME ON-LINE: A New Format for the Crime Report

The State of Vermont's Uniform Crime Reporting program has been in transition for several years. The program has been changing from a summary-based to an incident-based reporting system. The summary-based system which has been in effect since 1984 in Vermont provides information on only a limited number of crimes referred to as Part I and Part II crimes. The incident-based system reports on a much broader range of crimes and includes data on the circumstances of the crime, the victim, and the defendant. Vermont's transition mirrors similar changes in other states as law enforcement agencies across the country implement the Federal Bureau of Investigation's new crime reporting system known as the National Incident-Based Reporting System or NIBRS. In Vermont the new NIBRS format is known as Vermont Crime On-Line or VCON. 2004 is the debut year for VCON.

Vermont Crime On-Line is the first Vermont Crime Report which provides the full complement of data elements specified by NIBRS. VCON allows the user to view standard reports or to create their own custom reports on-line. Another advantage of the VCON format lies in enhanced data quality – more data and more accurate data. While the summary-based format collected crime data on 25 crimes, VCON collects data on 56 crimes. In addition, VCON will report for the first time information on the time and day when crimes occur, crime location type, the amount of property crime loss, victim injuries, statistical information on the age, gender, and race of both victims and defendants and other crime circumstance data of interest to the public, law enforcement, public administrators, legislators, and researchers.

The enhanced accuracy of VCON data stems from the manner in which it is collected. In the summary-based system, crime reporting was a separate function from dispatching and report writing. Once a call was dispatched and a report written, the summary-crime statistics were an additional manual duty to be performed. With VCON, dispatching, report writing, and crime reporting are all the same function. With the advent of computer-aided dispatching systems, when dispatchers enter the data required to dispatch a call, they simultaneously provide the data for VCON. Consequently, the incidence of crime in a community will be more accurately recorded due to the automated features of computer-aided dispatching and error checking.

### VERMONT CRIME ON-LINE Methodology

What is Included in VCON: The crime data provided for Vermont Crime On-Line is an enumeration of crimes known to law enforcement agencies. It is not an enumeration of all crimes that were committed in Vermont during calendar year 2004. Crimes that are included in VCON are based on reports received by law enforcement agencies from victims, officers who discover infractions, or other sources. Crimes that may have occurred but were not reported are not included in this report. All reports of crime have been validated by a law enforcement officer. That is, reports which are later shown to be unfounded (e.g., property reported as stolen but later discovered as misplaced) are not included in this report.

All agencies were required to submit crime data for Group A and Group B crimes as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's NIBRS program. The definitions for Group A and Group B crimes are accessible from the Vermont Crime On-Line site.

There are two important differences between the way in which crime is counted by VCON vs. the way crime was counted by the old summary system:

1. VCON collects data on 56 crimes vs. the 26 crimes counted in the old summary system. This change affects the way in which the data is displayed rather than the total amount of crime counted. VCON provides a greater level of detail than the old summary system.
2. VCON only collects data for Group B offenses (a group of 11 less serious crimes) when there is an arrest. The old summary system as implemented in Vermont collected data on all offenses. This change does result in a reduction in the total number of crimes reported on VCON.

The changes in the way in which crime is counted will result in a lower number of crimes reported in VCON than would be the case if the old summary system were used as the basis for the Crime Report.

Data Quality: The data in this report were provided by municipal, sheriff, state police, and other Vermont state law enforcement agencies which are solely responsible for the accuracy of their submissions. Agencies are required to utilize automated editing software to error check their data prior to submitting the information to the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC). The FBI performs similar edit checks on Vermont's data before including the data in the national system. The data which appears in VCON has undergone edit checking at both the local and federal level before being published.

The data quality of the VCON system is higher than that of the old summary system due to automated vs. manual data collection methods and the data quality editing that is performed at both the local and federal level. As such there will be some discrepancies when comparing crime data collected using the summary format vs. data collected using VCON. It is likely that due to more rigorous data collection standards the amount of crime reported in VCON will actually be less than the number of crimes reported in the old summary system.

Location Issues: Municipal police departments generally submit crime data which is limited to their town/city. Sheriff Departments report

crime data for towns for which they have law enforcement responsibilities. State Police and other state law enforcement agencies report crime data based on the location of the crime. It is not uncommon for towns to have different law enforcement agencies policing the jurisdiction depending on the time of day or day of the week. In these cases, the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) collates crime reports from all involved law enforcement agencies to ensure the accuracy of the town's crime rate.

Reporting Compliance: In 2004, crime data was received from all law enforcement agencies required to report. However, Bristol Police Department, Ludlow Police Department, Middlebury Police Department, Essex County Sheriff, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Liquor Control, and the Office of Attorney General, were either unable to contribute VCON data in an electronic format for 2004 or failed to submit a full year of data for 2004. As such, no data or incomplete data from these agencies are included on the Vermont Crime On-Line site. Data from other official sources for these agencies were included, however, in the Statewide Summary Crime Statistics totals on the Vermont Crime Report main page. Consequently there will be some discrepancies when comparing totals between the Statewide Summary Crime Statistics Report and Vermont Crime On-Line. It is estimated that the total crime reported by these agencies is approximately 4% of the total crime reported on the Vermont Crime On-Line site.

Population Figures: Population figures provided on the VCON site are based on 2003 estimates provided by the Vermont Department of Health.

## **2004 Report Format – Both Summary and VCON**

As discussed in the Methodology Section above there are discrepancies between crime counts reported in VCON vs. crime counts which would be reported using the old summary system. These discrepancies have arisen for three reasons: 1) changes in the way crimes are counted; 2) more rigorous data quality standards; and 3) paper reporting by a limited number of agencies. As such the 2004 Vermont Crime Report will be available in both the Summary and VCON formats. VCIC, however, has designated the Summary Format to be the official 2004 statewide crime statistics for 2004. It is expected that in future years as data quality issues are resolved only the VCON format will be reported.

Statewide, county, and town crime statistics using the VCON format are available from the Vermont Crime On Line page. Though the crime counts in VCON may be lower than those reported in the Summary Format, VCIC is confident that the crime circumstance data available on this site is valid. The insights that analysis of this incident-based data will yield for users outweigh concerns that data on the VCON site may not be complete. Users who may have reservations regarding underreporting are encouraged to report their findings in percentages.

During 2005, VCIC will be conducting extensive data quality audits to research the reasons for the discrepancies between the old and new crime reporting systems. In the meantime it is important to understand that the success of the VCON initiative is in part tied to public deployment of the data. That's because the quality of data increases as data quality becomes a public issue for contributing agencies. Similarly, the quality of data increases when it is put to the test by users who are examining a wide variety of issues. During the upcoming year, I encourage you to experiment with and learn from VCON. I look forward to bringing you data quality updates in the near future.