

NEW CRIME REPORTING SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED FOR THE 2005 VERMONT CRIME REPORT

The 2005 Vermont Crime Report was released today by the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) at the Department of Public Safety. VCIC also announced changes in the State's crime reporting system which will result in more accurate crime reporting statewide.

Crime Reporting In Transition

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. The incident-based system reports on a much broader range of crimes and includes data on the circumstances of crimes including characteristics of both victims and defendants. While data for summary-based program is provided by reporting agencies directly from their records management systems with little or no data quality review, the incident-based program requires rigorous data quality auditing. In Vermont the new incident-based format is known as Vermont Crime On-Line or VCON. 2004 was the debut year for VCON.

Discrepancies in Crime Reporting Systems

In 2004, VCIC noted that there were discrepancies between the summary-based data and the data that was reported to VCON. A comparison between the two systems indicated that the summary system resulted in higher crime report totals than did the incident-based VCON system. In light of these discrepancies the 2004 Crime Report was available in both the Summary and VCON formats.

In order to more fully understand these discrepancies, VCIC conducted an audit of the 2005 crime data both as it appears in reporting agency record management systems and as it was reported to VCON. It was determined that data collected using the unaudited data from the reporting agency record management systems was over reported and data in VCON was underreported. The over reporting was due to misclassification of crimes and multiple agencies reporting the same crime based on their involvement in a case.

VCON by reporting agencies was excellent. In less than 1% of the cases were classification problems found in the VCON data. The rigorous data quality auditing that is required by the VCON program appeared to be

working in terms of increased data accuracy. However, the audit did indicate that some crimes that were verified as accurate in reporting agency records management systems were not reported to VCON. Thus though the data that was reported to VCON was of excellent quality it was underreported.

New Crime Reporting System Adopted

In light of these findings VCIC decided to discontinue the use of unaudited data from reporting agency record management systems as the basis for reporting statewide crime statistics. Rather, only crime data reported to VCON and subject to data quality audits will be used to calculate the crime data. Though this change will increase the accuracy of the data there still remained the issue of underreporting. To resolve this issue reporting agencies were notified in June, 2006 that they would have 60 days to review their 2005 crime data and verify that all valid cases have been sent to VCON. As a result of this effort more than 2,000 additional cases were reported to VCON.

2005 Crime Report

For purposes of continuity, the 2005 Crime Report does contain a Statewide Crime Statistics table but the data is based only on the Crime Index Crimes (known as Part I crimes) designated by the FBI. The data in this table were obtained from VCON and collapsed into the Summary system crime types. In the past the Statewide Crime Statistics table contained both the Crime Index Crimes and a list of less serious crimes known as Part II crimes. Because of different reporting practices between the Summary and VCON system it is not possible to collapse VCON data into a valid Summary, Part II crime table. A complete enumeration of crimes reported to law enforcement is available from VCON. Crime statistics are arranged statewide, by county, and by town.

Because the data in the 2005 Crime Index table is based exclusively on audited data from VCON, the data in the 2005 Crime Index table indicates a lower volume of crime when compared with the Statewide Crime Index table (Part 1 crimes) from earlier years. Though VCIC is confident that the crime data reported in the 2005 VCON Vermont Crime Report is more accurate than the data in past years, the question arises as to whether the lower volume indicates a reduction in crime or is the lower volume a function of the change in the data collection method?

By estimating the 2005 Crime Index using the summary-based data collection method used in 2004 there appears to be a 1% - 3% reduction in Crime Index crimes between 2004 and 2005. Homicides were down from 11

victims in 2004 to 8 victims in 2005. Though homicides were down, the Violent Crime Index (Homicide, Rape, Aggravated Assault and Robbery) collectively increased by approximately 2.5%. The increase was due to an increase in Aggravated Assaults. The Property Crime Index (Burglary, Larceny, Motor Vehicle Theft, and Arson) declined by 3%. These findings are consistent with 2005 figures released by the FBI in June which indicated that the Violent Crime Index increased nationally by 2.5% and the Property Crime Index declined by 1.6%

Interested readers can access the complete 2005 Vermont Crime Report by connecting to Vermont Crime On-Line (VCON) from the [Department of Public Safety's web page](#). VCON is a web-based, fully interactive system which enables readers to view published crime reports or to create their own reports instantly on-line.