

High-tech hunter stalks criminal prey

If police profiler Brad Moore is on the case, a Lanark County arsonist should be very worried. Elaine O'Connor reports.

Elaine O'Connor

The Ottawa Citizen Tuesday, July 30, 2002

The fires that have destroyed seven barns in Lanark County over the past two weeks have long been put out, but residents' suspicions that an arsonist is to blame are still smouldering.

While the OPP and Ontario Fire Marshal's Office continue to investigate using traditional methods, such as sifting through charred evidence and conducting interviews, there is an innovative computer software program that could get them one step closer to the truth -- geographic profiling.

If there is an arsonist at work in Lanark County, the news that expert profiler OPP Det.-Sgt. Brad Moore was on the case would undoubtedly dampen the arsonist's enthusiasm.

Det.-Sgt. Moore is one of only three Canadian geographic profilers -- high-tech hunters of serial killers and rapists, arsonists and burglars -- who use sophisticated software to stalk their prey with deadly accuracy.

Det.-Sgt. Moore can't disclose whether he is working on the Lanark barn fires for fear of jeopardizing the investigation.

The 38-year-old officer is a member of an elite corps. He's one of only seven people in the world trained to operate profiling software called Rigel that gives police a direct line to the criminal mind.

"I can assist investigators in focusing in the most likely area where the offender lives, more quickly than in other techniques," Det.-Sgt. Moore explained. "It's an efficient way of managing the information in an investigation."



The Ottawa Citizen
Det.-Sgt. Brad Moore, at OPP headquarters in Orillia, tracks the possible location of criminals on what resemble topographical maps.

Rigel was invented in 1995 by Det.-Insp. Kim Rossmo, then with Vancouver police, who developed the software while working a beat and pursuing a PhD in criminology at Simon Fraser University in the late 1980s.

The program, named after a star in the Orion constellation known as "the hunter," pinpoints the offender's location based on crime scenes, working from the outside in to put the criminal's co-ordinates in crosshairs.

Det.-Sgt. Moore has been tracking Canadian criminals using the program since 1998. He has also helped track offenders in Australia, Denmark, Britain and the United States.

Arsonists are among the most difficult criminals to catch, profilers say, because any incriminating evidence is destroyed.

Serial arson is also seen as a "gateway" offence. Incidents are often motivated by bursts of rage or revenge, and arsonists have been known to graduate to more serious crimes. New York's "Son of Sam" serial killer David Berkowitz, for example, began as an arsonist.

Serial arsonists are caught in much the same way a serial killer is caught, Det.-Sgt. Moore said.

First, the profiler reviews all case files, then travels to crime sites and speaks with investigators before preparing a report.

The Rigel program creates profiles that look like topographic maps. The area where the perpetrator probably lives is coloured red. Crimes usually occur within a comfort zone radiating from this centre. As police identify suspects, their locations are plotted on the map using blue dots. Overlap with the red zone indicates a top suspect.

Police and fire officials working on the fires have already noticed patterns. Most of the fires occurred on either side of County Road 29 between Almonte and Carleton Place, most within 100 metres of the highway.

Mississippi Mills fire chief Art Brown said officials are also keeping tabs on the frequency of the fires. To date, fires have broken out on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, most between 4 p.m. and midnight.

Although Lanark County residents might be put at ease by a most-wanted list highlighting the qualities of the perpetrator, Det.-Sgt. Moore said it's difficult to outline a general profile of an arsonist.

"There are so many kinds of arsonists, that it's not really feasible to talk about an average individual," he said.

The officer has encountered serial arsonists in the past.

In 1999, he helped stalk Guelph's Exhibition Park arsonist by compiling a behavioural profile of the suspect, believed to be responsible for setting more than 25 fires. The fires ceased shortly after police publicized a profile of the fire starter, which may have intimidated him.

In 1998, Det.-Sgt. Moore's work with the Peel police force outside Toronto led to the capture and conviction of a serial sexual assaulter just nine days after he created a profile.

Also that year, he helped put an end to a string of more than 80 burglaries in cottage communities near Midland, Ont. The burglar was found at the centre of the profile -- an area just 100 metres square.

These are just a few of the cases Det.-Sgt. Moore can mention. Many others are winding their way through the courts.

"Of the cases that have been solved, the profile has been accurate in all cases," he said.

The Kingston Whig-Standard reported in April that Kingston police investigating the disappearance of Patty Ann Killingbeck have called Det.-Sgt. Moore to the case.

The Rigel system itself has an excellent track record, in some cases pinning the criminal to a single city block. The program was used successfully near the end of the Paul Bernardo investigation, placing him within a 10 square kilometre area. Mr. Bernardo's house was found right in the middle of the square.

Det.-Sgt. Moore, who has spent 16 years in policing, started training with Det.-Insp. Rossmo in 1997. He began his career in the Sebringville OPP detachment, then served in the OPP's behavioural sciences section.

There, he worked with the RCMP's Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS) technology, a Canada-wide database of homicides and violent crimes used to cross reference serial crimes, before the profiling position became available.

Despite a heavy workload of up to 80 cases a year, Det.-Sgt. Moore says it's the "best job in the world."

"You see all the best cases, or all the worst cases, as the case may be, all the toughest cases. And it's great getting out there and helping people on the front lines do their jobs better."

© Copyright 2002 The Ottawa Citizen