



**THESE ABUSERS HURT AND HURT AGAIN - IT'S A MOST-WANTED LIST THE PUBLIC NEVER SEES, BUT ST. PAUL POLICE SAY THEIR "CHRONIC-OFFENDER" LIST HELPS AUTHORITIES TRACK REPEAT DOMESTIC ABUSERS AND INTERVENE BEFORE CASES SPIN OUT OF CONTROL.**

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It's a list of 75 of St. Paul's worst domestic abusers -- attackers who won't stay away, refuse to take "no" for an answer and pose great danger to their victims.

These abusers have at least three domestic violence run-ins with police in the past 18 months, and they've been ordered to steer clear of their victims.

St. Paul police, prosecutors and victim advocates call this roll the "chronic-offenders" list. They're using it to keep tabs on repeat domestic abusers and protect the women they've been terrorizing. If an abuser slips up, authorities take notice -- and take action.

"For years we've realized that there are so many repeat, chronic offenders, so we've come up with a method of flagging these offenders by their violent behaviors," said Shelley Johnson Cline, executive director of the St. Paul Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

When escalating domestic violence ends in bloodshed or murder, broader questions often arise about whether the criminal justice system could have done more to protect the victim.

The Sept. 22 slayings of a Washington County woman and her boyfriend in her own home and the ensuing arrest of her estranged ex-boyfriend, Steve Van Keuren, stunned the community. Before her death, victim Teri Lee obtained a restraining order against Van Keuren, who had attacked her in her home with a knife.

In St. Paul, police officers say they believe the chronic-offenders list is making a difference. The St. Paul City Attorney's Office is filing more misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor charges for violations of stay-away orders. The number of charges filed in St. Paul jumped from 319 in 2002 to 438 in 2005.

The goal is to nab offenders who continue to harass or abuse their victims before things turn deadly.

"My belief is the chronic domestic offender is a potential candidate to commit a homicide down the road," said City Attorney John Choi. "We aggressively prosecute these cases and seek jail time."

Washington County's top prosecutor said the chronic-offenders program has piqued his interest.

"We are looking at our whole domestic-abuse program in Washington County," said Washington County Attorney Doug Johnson. "We just started our first steps on that. The Van Keuren case says, 'Let's look at what we are doing.' "

St. Paul police officer Jeff Keller has almost memorized the chronic-offender list. He's one of four St. Paul officers in the Family Violence Unit assigned to monitor these repeat abusers. Every morning he or another officer pores through the previous day's police reports looking for any chronic offenders.

The list is not public. The offenders don't know they're on it, even though some complain about the extra attention they feel they're receiving from police. Victims also are kept in the dark about the existence of the list.

Cline stressed that authorities do not randomly single out offenders. The list, she said, is based on specific criteria and violent behaviors.

"We are very deliberate. We were extremely mindful of the law when we created this," Cline said.

Men who abuse women dominate the list, but police say a man in a same-sex relationship and a woman also have ended up on the list. Offenders cycle off the list if they avoid a police encounter for 18 months.

Many men remain on the list longer because of repeated police contacts. Even when a victim severs an abusive relationship, a chronic offender may find a new girlfriend to harass and terrorize, so he stays on the list.

Police, prosecutors, probation officers and victim advocates meet the first Thursday of every month to go over the list. Authorities look for danger signs, including death threats, the use of weapons, choking, sexual violence and talk of suicide by the abuser. They pick 20 offenders to focus on for the month.

"It's getting everyone on the same page and creating that coordinated response," Cline said. "We know we need each piece to fulfill the puzzle."

Officers frequently stop by victims' homes to make sure chronic offenders are following stay-away orders issued by courts. Police talk to neighbors, family and friends to learn more about the offender -- when and where he works and when is he most likely to stop by his ex's home. They scrupulously document the case so prosecutors can use escalating penalties for repeat offenses and so nothing slips through the cracks.

Meanwhile, advocates focus on helping victims formulate emergency plans and work on realigning their lives without the abuser. Advocates provide emotional support and help the victim re-establish community connections.

Keller and the other officers often work nights and weekends, when an abuser is likely to stop by a victim's home and try to walk back into her life.

"You can't wait two days for someone to get a first look at these cases," Keller said. "Weekends are always covered."

When officers, usually in plainclothes, show up for a stay-away order compliance check, victims and offenders are often surprised. Keller said victims are always quick to tell their abusers they didn't call police. Sometimes victims act angry when the abuser is arrested, but victims secretly express relief when he's gone.

"You get him out of the house, and they say thank you," Keller said.

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**Caption:** ILLUSTRATION Citations taken from domestic abuse cases filed in Ramsey County District Court: " ... her ex-boyfriend had assaulted her two days earlier and was now calling and harassing her." "He told her he would knock her teeth out, cut her throat and watch her gurgle to death." "Defendant had bailed out of jail that morning in regard to a first-degree burglary and second-degree assault ..." GRAPHIC: PIONEER PRESS STAY AWAY OR ELSE St. Paul city prosecutors target those who don't obey orders to stay away from abuse victims. 2006: 435 cases\* \*Projected annual total based on cases filed from Jan. 1 through July 31, 2006. Source: St. Paul City Attorney's Office [See microfilm for graph]

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