

Bylaw busy, but making inroads



Colwood bylaw officers Kevin Atkinson and Rick Smith say frequent patrols to Esquimalt Lagoon and other lakes is making a dent in public drinking.

By [Sam Van Schie - Goldstream News Gazette](#)

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On a sunny afternoon, Kevin Atkinson and Rick Smith can be found walking along Colwood beaches.

In their black uniforms, the two bylaw officers stand out from the swarm of sun worshipers.

They've been visiting the shores of Colwood Lake, Lookout Lake and Esquimalt Lagoon several times a day this summer to patrol for open alcohol, beach fires or excessive noise. But mainly what they find are families enjoying the weather.

"I think people have heard we've been down here a lot. They've either stopped having alcohol at the beach or they're being a lot more discreet about it," Atkinson said.

The frequent foot patrol wasn't possible last year when, due to city cutbacks, Atkinson was the lone bylaw officer. Having Smith reinstated as a secondary officer is expected to double the number of cases the officers deal with.

So far this year, the bylaw office has completed more than 455 files to date, the most Colwood has ever dealt with in a single year. Last year the total was 350.

A file can be anything from a secondary suite application to neighbours complaining of unsightly premises or a problem the officers seek out on patrol.

At Esquimalt Lagoon, the officers stop to look inside an older couple's cooler and find a half-consumed six-pack of beer. They suggest the pair remove the cooler from the beach to avoid a fine

and the couple agrees to the request without issue — it's a quick open-and-closed file for the officers' database.

"People aren't always happy to see us," Smith said. "We don't want to ruin anybody's time at the beach. We don't often issue tickets unless somebody gives us attitude or we catch the same person day after day."

But even though they weren't fined, the couple, who asked not to be named, said they felt imposed upon. "I understand who they're targeting when they come down here. It's the partyers," the 58-year-old Esquimalt man said. "We weren't causing any problem."

The encounter wouldn't stop him from coming to the beach, he added, but he probably wouldn't bring alcohol next time. This is exactly the outcome the officers hope for.

Later at Lookout Lake, a foot patrol turns up nothing of concern. The officers linger briefly talking to people.

"What's important is that people see us out here and know we're keeping an eye on things," Atkinson said.

Between the two, bylaw officers are on duty in Colwood from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Saturday, and they also work an occasional Sunday shift.

They can write tickets for almost anything that an RCMP officer can except for speeding and fire arms.

"People are surprised to find out how much we do," Atkinson said. "When people have concerns they automatically call the RCMP, but they can call us to deal with issues in Colwood, that's what we're here for."

To reach the bylaw officers call Colwood city hall at 250-478-5999 or e-mail inspbylaw@colwood.ca.