

Citizens have right to know

EDITORIAL

Are you worried about it? Have you given it a second thought since it happened? Didn't think so. It seems Caledon OPP want it that way.

Let's go back a month. On Aug. 2 near Orangeville, human remains were discovered inside the shell of a vehicle that had been on fire. On its own, the incident is curious but nothing more. It might have been the result of foul play, but it also could have been a suicide or a very unfortunate accident.

As a journalist, you don't give it much of a second thought. The police will investigate and at some point will likely report their findings. Then it will be a story or not.

But just 72 hours later in Caledon, another body was found in another vehicle that had burned to a crisp. Now you want some answers. But wait (as they say on TV), there's more. On July 31, Caledon OPP discovered the body of a dead man at a residential property located on Humber Station Road. Soon after, they ruled the death a homicide.

And that was that from the police. There hasn't been a word since, except the investigations are ongoing, even though this paper has inquired on several occasions.

If you do this job long enough, especially if you do it in different cities, you learn that not all police services are created the same. In Montreal, they were friendly, but not very helpful. In Ottawa, they were often helpful but not all that friendly. London caught on a few years ago when a new media officer took over. The previous officer had been a bottleneck; a big, blue mass of frustration who wouldn't tell you if it was night or day.

Thankfully, they rotate that position and the new guy changed how they interacted with the media in just about every way. If information didn't compromise an investigation, he saw no reason to keep it to himself. In my opinion, that media office is the jewel in the crown for journalists, the police themselves, and the public, who want to know if they should be concerned for their own welfare after a serious crime has been committed in the city.

In fairness, it should be noted that the police departments I've mentioned are municipal, while Caledon, of course, is provincial. Still, a little goes a long way when you're talking about co-operation between journalists and first responders. I once sat on a bombshell of a story because publishing it might have ruined a months-long investigation involving a real estate agent and marijuana grow ops. The London police, OPP and even the RCMP had been on the trail and it was all about to go up in smoke, pardon the pun. I saw no tangible results of my generosity in the short run, but over time the chief, deputy chiefs, and various detectives made themselves available to me under sometimes unique circumstances. We had built trust between us.

Maybe that's what's lacking here. Caledon OPP scored points with me when the media officer went to the trouble of visiting the office a while back to say hello to the new guy. I found her to be engaging, likeable and easy to chat with. However, a month after a local homicide and two bodies were pulled from burned vehicles I have no more news to report. We don't know how the man on Humber Station died and we don't know if there's a connection between the two fires or even if they're being considered as criminal. It's your right to know if you have reason to be worried for your safety. It's my job to uncover and share that information with you. When I'm stopped from doing that, we all lose.