

# Project SAFE announces decline in violent crimes

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Project SAFE Rockingham County announces a significant decline in violent crime in 2013.

The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation released the annual crime report that shows a 20 percent decline in armed robberies.

Mayodan Police Chief Charles Caruso, PSRC executive board chairman, saw the decline as a welcome sign.

"I believe this is a strong indication that PSRC, along with other crime-fighting programs, is working well," he said in a release. "Although we are all pleased with our recent success, we realize that reducing violent crime is a big task. Project SAFE is a proactive approach that's data-driven."

PSRC, a federally supervised program, focuses on four violent crimes classified by the SBI: murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assaults.

"We were really excited to hear that in 2013, there was a decline in crime rates in the county," PSRC coordinator Guilio Dattero said. "We are grateful for the years in which those declines occur."

Dattero said that in 2012, there was an up spike in armed robberies.

PSRC organizes "notifications," which are call-in meetings where "the most violent gun offenders from around the county are called in and given an ultimatum to put down their guns or face the wrath of the entire criminal justice system," according to its website.

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Guilio Dattero,  
coordinator, PSRC

During the meetings, a panel of local, state and federal law enforcement leaders gives a warning to offenders that the next gun violation results in them receiving no plea bargain and no relaxed sentencing.

At the close of the meeting, social services volunteers counsel the offenders and discuss ways they can receive assistance in an effort to work their way back into mainstream community, including

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job training, acquiring their GED, literacy, drug rehabilitation, transportation and housing.

"If they are working, they are also less likely to be involved in crime and violence," Dattero said.

PSRC and local law enforcement place more emphasis on armed robbery offenders.

"The more serious offenders are most likely to go back to prison," Dattero said. "The meetings are a very practical, down-to-earth approach and a final warning to about 15 to 20 offenders twice a year."

Dattero encourages the public, especially the community leaders and activists to attend the notification meetings. The next one occurs at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 12, at the Agricultural Center in Wentworth.

"Having those masses of people there will show the offenders what zero tolerance of gun

violence in this community means," Dattero said. "Call-in meetings issue a warning, but also encourage change."

In addition to the notification meetings, PSRC performs gun screenings at the district attorney's office.

"The district attorney and assistant district attorney really push hard on prosecution against armed robbery," Dattero said.

Funded by county government, Dattero said PSRC operates in partnership with law enforcement, along with political leaders and volunteers.

"We have the most impressive combination of people of all walks of life working to reduce gun violence," he said.

According to the report, out of 253 offenders who attended the notifications to date, only eight have committed another offense, giving the program a 96.8 percent compliance rate.

"It's very compelling and significant," Dattero said. "This doesn't happen anywhere."