

Crime is down in Richmond through September but homicides are up, police chief says

- [Ali Rockett](#)
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Police Chief Gerald Smith talks about homicides in the city as he presents the 2021 Third Quarter Report to the Community during a press conference at police headquarters in Richmond, VA Friday, Oct. 29, 2021.

Despite staffing shortages at the Richmond Police Department that have City Council concerned, crime — with the exception of homicides — in the city is down, according to a report that Police Chief Gerald Smith provided Friday. Smith gave members of the news media an update on crime figures through Sept. 30, which marks three-quarters of the way through the year. While those figures are a month old, the trends have stayed roughly the same, according to year-to-date figures available on the department's website.

Through Sept. 30, Richmond police reported **59 homicides**, an increase of nearly 20% over the same date last year. But that figure doesn't include 10 other killings that occurred in the city:

- one fatal shooting along the interstate that is being investigated by Virginia State Police;
- the alleged hazing death of a Virginia Commonwealth University student in which 11 people have been charged;
- two shooting deaths that police have deemed justified; and
- six other slayings that Richmond police categorize as death investigations rather than homicides.

“That’s a number up there that speaks to a life,” Smith said Friday. “That speaks to our community losing the potential of what a life could have offered it, that speaks to the pain of loss of family, friends, loved ones, co-workers. So it is a number that we’re talking about but we cannot lose sight of ... the life behind that number.”

In the intervening month, Richmond police recorded an additional six homicides, according to year-to-date figures provided at Friday's news conference. That year-to-date total of 65 homicides is one shy of last year's death toll, according to police. Those numbers don't include some deaths that Richmond police are required to record in their homicide statistics, including self-defense killings.

Smith said that the points or causes of conflicts had included social media and stress brought on by the ongoing pandemic and a lack of jobs and resources.

He added that RPD recently was awarded an \$800,000 federal grant from the Department of Justice for targeting violent crime, as well as increasing community involvement.

Most other categories of crime are down, Smith said.

The major crime category includes all violent and property crimes. Major crime for the first nine months of 2021 was below any figure for the same period in the past five years.

"We're headed down," Smith said. "So that is a very good trend that we're also seeing at the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2021, too."

One property crime is up, Smith said: thefts of catalytic converters. He suggested that concerned car owners buy or have installed a web of thick cables around the that can make theft more difficult.

Several Richmond City Council members spoke at a council meeting Monday, and again at a meeting of the council's Public Safety Committee on Tuesday, about their concerns with how understaffed the department was and how officers were leaving because of low morale and better pay elsewhere.

“I’m scared for our city,” said Councilwoman Kristen Nye Larson, who represents the 4th District, at Monday’s meeting. “We’ve always had a boots-on-the-ground police force ... and right now we just barely have enough folks to answer the calls.”

Smith told council members that his department had 102 vacancies and an additional 70-plus officers unavailable because of medical, military or administrative leave, which means the department is operating at about 75% of its authorized strength.

When asked Friday whether the staffing shortages had any effect on the rising number of homicides, or falling number of other crimes, Smith said officers were “working their butts off every day.”

“They get after it every day,” he said. “So these numbers, yes, you can see that they had a huge part of that. The community has a huge part in that, in calling this up. But we cannot continue to run our officers like that. ... The increase you see is unfortunate, but it could be so much worse.”

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