

RECESSIONS, DRUGS, AND IMPACTS ON PROPERTY CRIME IN CALGARY

The average number of break & enter and vehicle theft incidents in Calgary has increased by more than 50% since early 2015.

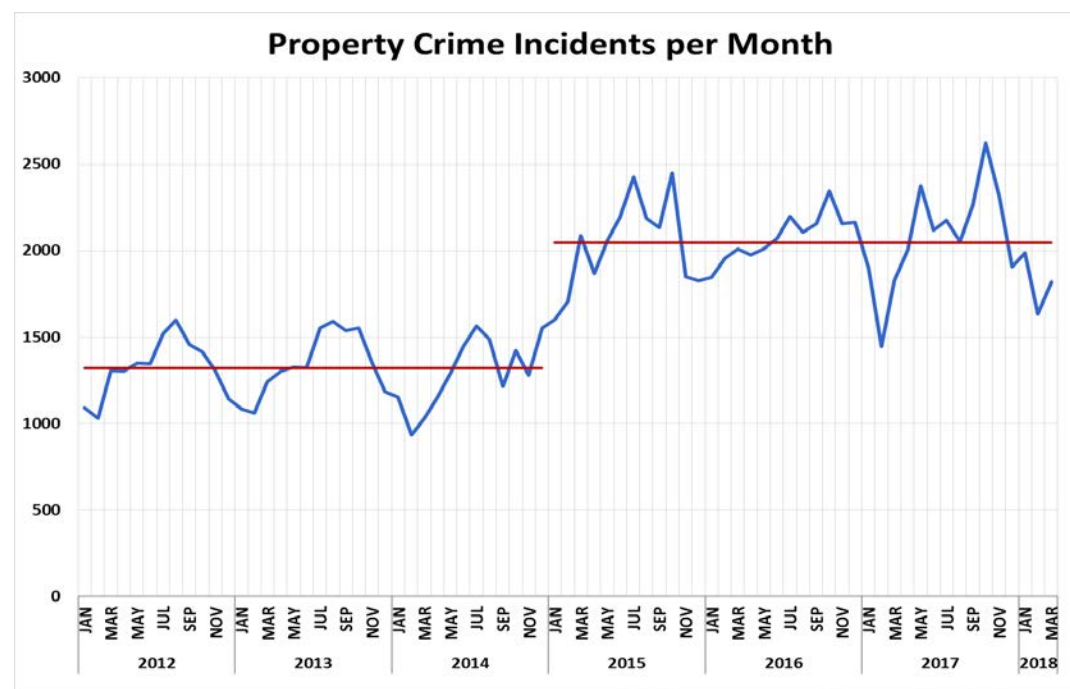
The graph reports monthly data on incidents of what we refer to as property crime in the City of Calgary – break and enter and vehicle theft – and its spread over time. The horizontal red lines identify the average number of incidents in each month during two periods: January 2012 to December 2014 and January 2015 to March 2018.

The data show a clear jump in the number of property crime incidents beginning in early 2015. Such a sudden and large increase in property crime suggests an equivalently sudden and large change in one or more causal factors, which would explain the increase in property crime incidents. The following two explanations are plausible.

Changes in property crime rates are often identified as being correlated with changes in economic conditions, drug price fluctuations and availability, as well as seasonal weather patterns.

The unemployment rate in Calgary began to climb in March 2015 and hence the timing of the increase in property crime incidents corresponds with the onset of recession. This is consistent with evidence suggesting that economic downturns contribute to rising rates of [property crime](#) by creating both crime opportunity and motivation.

Another possible explanation for the rise in property crime occurrences would be the introduction of a new and highly addictive drug. The timing of when fentanyl and other opioids became more readily available in



Source: Calgary Police Service, <http://www.calgary.ca/cps/Pages/Statistics/Calgary-Police-statistical-reports.aspx>

Calgary cannot be observed directly but can be inferred from Alberta Health Services [data](#), showing that deaths due to fentanyl use more than tripled in 2015 relative to 2014. To the extent illegal drug use is costly to finance, the timing of the opioid crisis is also a plausible explanation for the rise in property crimes.

The data in the graph also shows how weather conditions may play a role in explaining variations in property crime episodes. Incidents tend to rise in the summer months and fall in the winter. However, contrary to past weather patterns, the seasonal rhythm changed beginning in late 2014 when, rather than the usual winter-related decline in property crimes, occurrence of those crimes increased quickly and substantially.

The costs of recessions and drug addiction fall most heavily on those who suffer job loss and addiction but are also borne by the victims of crime. Therefore, policies aimed at addressing these social problems would benefit society at large.