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By Canadian Press

Two men arrested after drone spotted flying near east-end Montreal jail

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MONTREAL — Two men were arrested on suspicion of flying a drone near an east-end Montreal jail early Monday, highlighting a problem of growing concern to Canadian correctional authorities as they work to prevent drugs, phones and other contraband from being dropped into inmates' hands.

Prison guards saw the drone flying near the Riviere-des-Prairies detention centre at around 1 a.m. and called Montreal police, who arrested the suspects in a nearby wooded area.

The men, aged 38 and 42, were found carrying a drone and a package containing at least one cell phone and a charger.

Provincial police, who have taken over the investigation, say the prison was searched to see if any drugs or other contraband items were successfully dropped before the arrest, but nothing was found.

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The two suspects were questioned and released. The drone was seized, but authorities have not yet decided what charges the men will face.

Sgt. Daniel Thibodeau says it's common to see drones flying near detention facilities, but police are rarely able to make arrests.

"This type of report is frequent, where correctional officers see drones," he said. "What's not frequent is that we're able to get our hand on the people responsible."

Data released by the Quebec government last year showed a sharp jump in the number of drone sightings near jails, rising to 211 in 2017-18 from four in 2013-14. For 2018-19, 173 drones were spotted or intercepted near provincial detention centres between April 1 and Jan. 31.

In an email, a spokesman for Quebec's public security minister said the province's drone prevention strategy was part of a larger effort to improve overall safety at detention centres, which includes surveillance equipment, observation, inmate searches and physical barriers.

The problem is also a concern for federal prisons, which have noted an increase in "the number of weapons, drugs, alcohol, cellphones and other contraband items entering Canadian prisons," according to a government website.

Correctional Services Canada put out a call last fall for an "innovative and cost-effective technology solution" to prevent illicit items from being delivered by drones or thrown over fences.

"Drones in particular are seen as an emerging risk due to their increasing capabilities and decreasing costs, making them an easily accessible means of introducing contraband into an institution, creating diversions, or covert surveillance," it said. The department said it received 29 submissions that are under



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Hart said in an email that while more drones are being spotted over federal prisons, “analysis has revealed that drone sightings have no discernible impact on the presence of drugs in correctional institutions.”

Thibodeau said police or prison workers sometimes recover the contraband or the drone used to deliver it, but it’s hard to prove who was responsible without catching the culprit in the act. He said Monday’s arrest may be one of the “rare times” authorities can lay charges.

Morgan Lowrie, The Canadian Press

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