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AMY'S FATAL FAME
metroLIFE



A National Geographic report suggests Edmonton as one of several cities its international readers should travel to this summer, pointing out its surfeit of festivals, markets and food.
See **metronews**. KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

Rancid rentals for city's poor

EXCLUSIVE - PROJECT WATCH

Police probe of motels finds mice, bedbugs and asbestos

Ryan Tumilty
Metro | Edmonton

Albertans in financial distress are being housed in substandard conditions at discount motels on the province's dime with the government unaware of the squalor, a year-long police investigation revealed.

Edmonton Police began the investigation, dubbed Project Watch, when they noticed higher crime rates around a cluster of west-end motels. But as it unfolded, they found people on social assistance occupying rooms filled with mice, bedbugs and asbestos. As a result, police are

investigating motels across the city and bringing in other agencies for help.

Det. Kevin Rald, one of two officers assigned to Project Watch, said he was stunned at the state of rooms covered on the government tab.

Rald added that Alberta Works, which oversees rooms for people in financial distress, appeared ignorant to the reality of the situation—the only interactions with clients were via phone.

"These places were a mess. What we found was there were bed bugs, cockroaches, mould, asbestos," he said.

According to data provided by Human Services in late 2014, the province placed 1,040 people in motel rooms on an emergency basis during the 2011-2012 fiscal year. In 2013-2014, that number jumped to 2,276. The cost of these lodgings has risen to nearly \$4 million annually.

Kathy Telfer, a spokesperson for Human Services, was unable to provide current costs and admitted the organization didn't know about the state of the rooms.

"It was new information to us. We know that there is a challenge in finding temporary accommodations for families who are finding themselves in these situations and needing supports."

Supt. Brad Doucette, who first pushed Rald to look into spiking crime rates around motels, said officers are now working with health personnel, city bylaw officials, occupational health and safety and Alberta Works to improve living conditions for the families living in these properties.

INSIDE

Family struggles to find normalcy while living in various motels — Page 4

"MNP gave me long-term solutions, not short-term fixes."



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