

Police charge over 30 people in connection with illegal casinos and gaming houses

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Police executed a search warrant at this Scarborough storefront as part of an investigation into illegal gambling dens. (Makda Ghebreslassie/CBC)

Toronto police have charged over thirty people in an investigation that uncovered 33 illegal gaming houses and casinos in the city's east end.

Staff Sergeant Andrew Ecklund said officers have shut down three illegal casinos and nine illegal gaming houses.

"Predominately, they're in the Midland and Finch area and the Kennedy and Passmore are, but they are sprinkled throughout the division," said Ecklund at a Friday news conference.

Ecklund described a typical gaming house as a small -sized room with two or three gambling tables. The rooms can hold up to 20 people, he said.

Police say the casinos are well furnished with bars, lounges, and massage rooms. "Our illegal casinos are just what they sound like. It looks like, acts like a casino. They're large," said Ecklund.

Ecklund says there is an increase in violence in the division because of the illegal gaming spots.

"We've had a double shooting at a location at Passmore and Kennedy. We've had a robbery at 141 Montezuma. We've had people that have been assaulted, beaten and robbed out front of these locations," said Ecklund.

Police are concerned for the safety of those living nearby and those attending the illegal casinos and gaming houses.

"They are getting robbed. There is a criminal element going to these locations, extorting people running these and robbing people inside, so it's very dangerous for anybody who's attending any of these locations." said Ecklund.

Police say they've searched and seized:

- Multiple gaming tables for baccarat, mahjong.
- Casino-style chips.
- Casino-style gambling machines.
- Various illegal drugs: marijuana, cocaine, crystal meth.

"We actually have seized enough to fill two rooms with gaming equipment," said Ecklund.

42 division investigators say these smaller gaming houses are mobile.

Investigators want the public to give them a call if they see any indication of an illegal gaming house.

The public can call 416-808-4200 or anonymously at Toronto Crime Stoppers 416-222-TIPS.