

Bill Rea ? More regulating?

I don't think anyone could be blamed for feeling like we live in an over-regulated society.

The problem is things are likely to get a lot worse. The recent terrorist attacks throughout the world are going to do little more than make people more suspicious of each other. I predict there will be calls for more enforcement of certain regulations, as well as more state-sanctioned interference with all of our lives.

Alas, until we can find some way to stop people from driving trucks into crowds, as what happened last week in Nice, France, I think all of us are going to find ourselves living somewhat more restricted lives.

I once read a theory that concerns about acts of terror and trying to keep ahead of the terrorists could result in the type of system George Orwell depicted in Nineteen Eighty-Four. I doubt things could ever get that bad, but unless we find a way to curb terrorism, I have to wonder if it could be prevented.

But until we reach that day, I think it's important for people to tell government to mind its place when it comes to certain regulations. That's what went through my head the other day when I heard that Toronto City council wants the Province to ban pedestrians from texting or talking on phones while they walk on the sidewalks.

Fortunately, from what I've heard and read so far, the Provincial government is not likely to act on that.

While I would oppose measures like what councillors in Hog Town are trying to do, I can certainly understand the sentiment behind the effort.

I don't often get into down town Toronto, although I used to fairly frequently when I worked in the city some 20 years ago. Driving, or even walking along the major thoroughfares, like Yonge Street, Bay Street, Queen Street or University Avenue, could be really eye-opening, or potentially eye-shutting. I thought then, and still do, that pedestrians pose a most serious danger in terms of traffic safety.

I would be appalled at what I sometimes saw, especially at rush hour. Masses of pedestrians would stand at the corner, waiting for the lights to change. Once they got their signal, off they would go. There were no looks to see if all the traffic had stopped.

And these were days before social media or texting, so I think it stands to reason that things would get worse.

On the other hand, what ever happened to the concept of people taking responsibility for themselves?

I mentioned this move on the part of City council in the office the other day, and found a lot of agreement for my position among my colleagues.

?If some idiot is texting and smashes into a wall, then good for him,? one of them exclaimed, as I rushed for my note pad to write the words down.

How do you argue with that logic? It makes sense, especially if we realize it's based on simple common sense.

?Look both ways before you cross the street.?

There was one of the safety rules from Elmer the Safety Elephant in my day. Many of these people I saw walking carelessly across busy streets would have had young children. What would they have said to them?

The main problem with regulating texting is it restricts what people may or may not do in a public space. And while the space is public, the communications that go on are private, or at least they are until Big Brother takes over. What right do the authorities have to regulate when they can be exchanged? And what is to come next? Today, we ban texting while walking. When to we ban conversation?

While I had problems when they passed laws against texting or talking on hand-held devices while driving, I agree those are different circumstances. There is a difference between texting while walking down a street and texting while in control of a couple of tons of metal moving at maybe 30 km-h.

I am very much in favour of people using their common sense, and have a lot of problems with people in authority trying to regulate it.

I guess I have the same problem as many of you. I don't text, and I'm not anxious to start. I get so many emails that I have tons of trouble keeping up, so there's not much point in me dragging more social media into it. But I also don't like being bossed around. If I choose not to text, I'm capable of making that decision all by myself. I don't need politicians doing it for me.

But it also appears that sometimes they get it right. In some cases, they are just correcting a previous decision that was just plain dumb.

That same municipal council that is so anti-texting has at least come to its senses when it comes to allowing street hockey.

I will grant there are a couple problems with the activity, but they can be solved.

I was lucky enough to live my formative years on a cul-de-sac in the west end of Toronto, which is a great place to play street

hockey. I burned off a lot of blubber that I might have accumulated had I just been sitting in front of the TV.

True, we made a lot of noise, that occasionally annoyed the neighbours. But what of it? We were children at play. We were supposed to make noise. Any adult or senior who can't appreciate that evidently missed out on a lot when they were a kid.

And I guess we were guilty of trespassing the odd time. But it is a fact that when a player takes a slapshot, causing a tennis ball to careen off the goalie's head and land in a little old lady's flower bed, someone has to go get it. We always did try to be careful not to damage anything.

I was frankly surprised that any politician in Canada would have had the nerve to try and restrict the playing of street hockey. The game is really part of the Canadian culture.

During the years when I was working in Toronto, traffic calming was becoming a major issue. One of the local councillors prevailed on some of his constituents to host open houses on the front lawns Saturday mornings so he could hear public input. As the local scribe, I attended these sessions, which sometimes got heated.

At one point, the topic of street hockey came up, with one lout loudly proclaiming it should be banned, and finding a lot of opposition to that position.

The highlight of the exchange came when one man declared it's every Canadian child's God-given right to play street hockey, with Big Mouth getting mad at him for dragging the Almighty into the debate.

I forget how that exchange ended. It was one of those occasions when I witnessed adults not measuring up.

I wonder if they know to look both ways before crossing the street

