

No reason to drive impaired this holiday season

EDITORIAL

The holiday season is upon us as we gather with our friends, family and loved ones in the next few weeks.

During the end of the year, it's commonplace for many to share alcohol, cannabis and other mind-altering substances. Those enable them to bask in the euphoria after a hard-worked year.

This time of the year, however should be used to celebrate our times with the people we love and not act carelessly, radically and wreak unnecessary havoc.

Driving impaired is a problem that can and must be avoided. There's absolutely no reason to drive impaired. You will only put yourself and those on the road at risk if you choose to drive drunk, high or under any other influence.

Police reported 72,039 impaired driving incidents in 2015, according to Statistics Canada's latest data. Of that total number of incidents, 122 were cases of impaired driving causing death and 596 were cases of impaired driving cases causing bodily harm.

The impaired driving rate in 2015 was 65 per cent lower than the rate in 1986 and 4 per cent lower than the rate observed in 2014, however one life lost to impaired driving is one too many.

Alcohol impairment and the affects it has on driving are well-recorded, however those who choose to drive while under the influence of cannabis should not drive at all even if they believe they're still capable of driving.

Impairment from cannabis begins almost immediately and can last up to six hours or more, depending on factors such as THC levels and how it's consumed, according to a reported by the Canadian Society of Forensic Science.

Frequent high-dose THC users may experience even longer periods of impairment, however, since the effects of cannabis vary, there is no way to know exactly how long to wait before it is safe for you to drive. The best way to avoid impaired driving is to not take a chance. If you're using cannabis, plan another way home.

Among the aforementioned police reported impaired driving incident in 2015, nearly 3,000 involved drug-impaired driving, include seven incidents causing death and 19 causing bodily harm.

The data is also broken down by gender and age. About 80 per cent of individuals charged by police with impaired driving in 2015 were male but the proportion of females, at 20 per cent, has increased over the last three decades. Men were responsible for most of the decrease in police-reported impaired driving incidents over the last 30 years.

In terms of age, the highest police-reported impaired driving rate was among drivers aged 20 to 24. Ontario, among Quebec, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan have extended a zero tolerance for impaired driving to all young drivers, whether or not they are new drivers.

If you plan to hit the road and drive to someone's house to celebrate with the intent of being inebriated, be sure to plan ahead. Whether that means telling your friend to hold on to your car keys, bringing an extra pillow or blanket to sleep over or calling Home James or other car driving services, plan ahead before you hit the road.

As well, even if you don't plan to get intoxicated but end up doing so, make sure you tell someone who can help you when you're unable to help yourself.