

No spike in cannabis impaired driving, so far

Written By JOSHUA SANTOS

Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) in Caledon have not seen an increase in cannabis impaired driving at this time.

Canadian police departments across the country have also not seen an uptick in high drivers as alcohol impaired driving continues to be the common reason police arrest impaired drivers, according to media reports.

Police forces and provincial and territorial Crowns were canvassed across the country with some officials saying it's too early to provide data while others said initial numbers and anecdotal impressions suggest it is not on the rise following the legalization of marijuana recently.

There is no way to tell currently if impaired driving has gone up since the legalization of cannabis has occurred, said Const. Ian Michel. It occurred less than a month ago so more time will be needed to look at the numbers as they come in.

Michel said impaired driving, alcohol or drug, is a major concern for the OPP across the province, not just in Caledon.

The OPP remains committed to ensuring Ontario roads are safe from any kind of impaired driving, said Michel. Impaired driving has always been illegal and this won't change with the legalization of cannabis. We encourage people to plan ahead, if you drink or use cannabis don't drive. In this day and age with all of the ride-sharing applications, taxis, buses there is never a need to drive impaired.

Tickets have been issued in Caledon since the legalization of cannabis. The most common offences have been individuals under 19-years-old possessing cannabis and having it readily available to a person in a motor vehicle.

The fine for a person under 19 possessing cannabis is \$100, said Michel. The fine for having open cannabis in a boat or vehicle is \$175. The seizure of cannabis is also allowed for people found in contravention of these laws.

Just recently, Caledon OPP state that they have had six charges under the Cannabis Act for people who had cannabis readily available while operating their motor vehicle.

Recent data from Statistics Canada found one in seven cannabis users said they recently got behind the wheel within two hours of consuming the drug. Men were nearly two times more likely than females to report this behaviour.

Driving impaired is dangerous, however driving with a passenger while impaired is even more alarming.

Five percent of survey respondents told Statistics Canada that they had accepted a ride from a driver who consumed cannabis within two hours.

These results were published two months before recreational cannabis was legalized amid concerns that roads would be dangerous with stoned drivers.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada approved the first drug screening device, called the Dragger Drug Test 5000, to assist police in detecting drug impaired drivers in Aug. 27.

The OPP is still considering how this or other drug screening devices will be used and has participated in RCMP-led training sessions, said Michel. The OPP continues to assess the value of this equipment and other oral fluid screening devices, recognizing that the science and technology will continuously improve. The use of SFST (standardised field sobriety tests) training and DRE (drug recognition expert) will continue to be the primary enforcement tools against drug-impaired drivers for the OPP.

An analyzer will be equipped with each unit of the Dragger Drug Test 5000. that uses cassettes that collect samples of saliva from drivers. It costs about \$5,000 per unit.

Concerns have been raised that the Dragger Drug Test 5000 provides false positive results with police departments questioning its accuracy in sub-zero temperatures, according to media reports.

This has prompted many police forces to not use the federally-approved device.

Michel said Caledon OPP will continue to use Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) checkpoints to detect impaired drivers who consumed alcohol or drugs.

As of July 1, new Highway Traffic Act amendments came into effect which includes zero tolerance for young, novice and commercial drivers, said Michel. Increased financial sanctions will be coming in Jan. 2019. The OPP is also expanding its Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) program and Standardized Field Sobriety Testing (SFST) training to enhance the detection and evaluation of drug impaired-drivers.

The OPP said they will begin their festive RIDE program on Nov. 23, where more officers will be on the roads looking for impaired drivers.

The OPP is committed to promoting community safety and the OPP Community Safety

Services has developed presentation materials that will cover topics relating to cannabis legalization. These presentations will be

delivered by local Community Safety and School Resource Officers. We will also continue to review and research partnerships for community programs that assist in preventing crime and victimization as well as improve public safety. Programs like DARE and OPP Kids are examples of this?