

Don't take a chance - OPP focusing this week on distracted drivers

By Brian Lockhart

By now everyone knows that using a hand-held device while driving is both dangerous and illegal.

Use common sense and put your cell phone in the glove compartment while driving and avoid paying the price if you make that one call and get caught.

The Ontario Provincial Police are focusing on distracted driving over the March break and will be on the lookout for drivers who try to sneak in a call while on the road.

By now, the majority of drivers and passengers have witnessed, had a close call, or been involved in a collision with a driver who was texting, talking on their cell phone or engaged in some other form of distraction. Last year, the OPP responded to 8,711 crashes that were linked to driver inattention, said OPP commissioner and provincial commander of traffic safety and operational support, Brad Blair.

Over the past five years, inattentive drivers have caused more accidents than any other driver.

They have been responsible for 83 road fatalities on OPP patrolled roads in 2017 surpassing speed related deaths at 75, alcohol / drug related deaths at 46, and not using a seat belt at 49, for the same time frame.

Since 2009, (the year Ontario Distracted Driving laws took effect) 692 have been killed on the roads in collisions that involved an inattentive driver.

If convicted of distracted driving a fully licensed driver will receive a fine of \$400 plus a victim surcharge and court fee for a total of \$490 if settled out of court and three demerit points applied to your driving record.

Drivers who endanger others because of any distraction including hand-held and hands-free devices may still be charged with careless driving or even dangerous driving.

Hazardous waste investigated

On March 7, 2018 Caledon OPP were contacted by the Caledon Fire Department after a large amount of garbage was located dumped on edge of private property located on Mountainview Road in Town of Caledon. A strong odour of a chemical was detected from the bags.

Members of Caledon OPP, OPP UCRT, and Caledon Fire Department responded to the scene and closed this area. The road was closed while clean-up took place.

All bags of waste were removed and disposed of in a safe manner by a licensed Hazardous Materials disposal contractor. There was no risk to the public and no evacuation of local residents was required.

The OPP is currently investigating to try and determine the source of the material and identify who dumped it. Police are requesting that if members of the public come across similar occurrences they are asked not touch material but should contact Caledon OPP as soon as possible. If anyone has information in relation to this investigation they are encouraged to contact Caledon OPP or Peel Crime Stoppers.

Romance scams

March is Fraud Prevention Month, and during it the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are giving advice on some current scams, including the Romance Scam.

Many hearts are broken in the quest for love, leaving some people financially wounded. Romance scams cause victims severe financial loss and, due to the emotional impact and personal embarrassment, these crimes are not reported to police, the force said in a release Wednesday.

Members of the OPP Anti-Rackets Branch say criminals use the Romance Scam to find potential victims online, generally single or recently unattached people of all ages. Usually this form of mass marketing fraud occurs through singles and dating-related 'meet' websites, social media platforms, or e-mail blasts.

In 2017, the Romance Scam generated 352 complaints and caused 250 victims to lose \$6.2 million in Ontario alone. The dollar value is the second highest fraud in the province and police admit that this may represent just five per cent of the total number of victims.

As part of the annual Fraud Prevention Month campaign, the OPP and its partners at the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre have some tips to help you avoid becoming a victim of the Romance Scam.

First, ask yourself - 'Would someone I have never met, really declare their love for me after only a few letters or emails?' If the answer is no, report it to police.

Don't give out any personal information in an email or when you are chatting online. Educate yourself. Check the person's name, the company name, and the addresses used.

Never send money, or give personal credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know and trust. A request to send money to a foreign country or to someone you have never personally met should be a red flag.

Check website addresses carefully. Scammers often set up fake websites with addresses that are very similar to legitimate dating websites.

If you or someone you know suspect they've been a victim of the Romance Scam, contact your local police service. You can also file a complaint through the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or online at <https://www.tipsubmit.com/start.htm>s