

International Conference on Distracted Driving

Herb Simpson,
President and CEO, Traffic Injury Research Foundation

Welcoming Comments

Good morning. I am Herb Simpson, President & CEO of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, a national registered charity dedicated to reducing road crashes, through effective programs and policies based on sound research. We are delighted to be a partner with CAA in organizing this timely and important conference. The issue of distracted driving is gaining prominence on the safety agenda around the world. Just four months ago, a conference on Distracted Driving was held in Australia. A key point emerging from that meeting was the need to focus on the wide range of distractions that confront the driver – not to remain fixated on just one source of distraction such as cellular phones. Our conference has also adopted this broader perspective.

Welcome and thanks to all of you for participating in what we are certain will be an informative and productive three days. As testimony to this expectation, you need only consider the quality of the speakers we have assembled, thanks to the efforts of our very prestigious Advisory Committee.

Let me add as well my thanks to our many sponsors for their generous support. The diversity of these organizations speaks volumes about how widely based the concern is about distracted driving.

We have structured this conference to maximize the opportunities for obtaining the latest information about distracted driving and to facilitate informed discussion about how to advance this state-of-knowledge to deal effectively with the problem. To that end, the conference involves a blend of formal presentations and workshops.

The formal paper presentations over the next few days will examine what we know and don't know about distracted driving, and how it can be dealt with effectively through various means, such as technology, education, and legislation. As you will have noted in your program, each panel session involves a number of distinguished speakers – after the speakers in a session have made their remarks, the Chair of the session will invite you to address questions to the panel.

Each plenary session is followed by a workshop, designed to provide an opportunity to explore in detail some of the critical issues related to distracted

driving. This will give you a chance to bring your expertise to bear on this important topic and voice your opinions and views.

There will be five workshop sessions throughout the conference. Each of these sessions will involve a number of simultaneous discussion groups, to maximize the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of views. Each group will be addressing the same questions/issues. These questions/issues can be found in the binder you received at registration. So, if you want, you can give some prior thought to them. Your group will be led by a moderator who will try to ensure that everyone is heard and the discussion stays on topic. Moderators will meet in the evening to synthesize their findings and a summary report will be presented to plenary the following morning so you can get a sense of the commonality and diversity of findings among the other groups.

To ensure that the discussion in your group benefits from a variety of perspectives, we have assigned people so that each group is heterogeneous -- composed of a blend of government representatives, industry, health and safety professionals, police, researchers, and so on.

Moreover, to ensure you have an opportunity to interact with as many delegates as possible we have mixed up the group composition across sessions. This means you are not always with the same cast of characters. Accomplishing this has been a bit of a logistical nightmare but we think it is worthwhile and that we have succeeded.

We trust you will enjoy the next few days. We will all learn something. Collectively we will create something – a research agenda identifying what information is needed to provide a better understanding of the extent, causes and consequences of distracted driving, and an action agenda identifying what programs and policies need to be developed and evaluated so that the initiatives being taken or promoted are evidence-based.

It is now my distinct honour to introduce our keynote speaker this morning, the Honourable Harinder Takhar, Minister of Transportation for the Province of Ontario and MPP for Mississauga Centre.

Mr. Takhar was elected to the Ontario Legislature in October 2003, and appointed Minister of Transportation at that time by Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Mr. Takhar has held leadership positions with several Canadian companies, including AGRA Industries Limited, Linear Technology Inc./Genum Corporation and Timex Canada Inc.

He served as the President and CEO of the Chalmers Group of Companies until his election to the Ontario Legislature. In 1995, one of the Chalmers Group of

Companies, headed by Mr. Takhar, was recognized by the Financial Post as a finalist among Canada's top 50 best-managed private companies. The company was also given the Outstanding Business Achievement Award by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in 1999.

A tireless volunteer and community supporter, he received the 2001 Community Service Award from the Society of Management Accountants of Ontario for "demonstrating selflessness and kindness for the benefit of society."

In addition to a term as Chair of the United Way of Peel Region, he served as chair and member of the board of governors of the Credit Valley Hospital, and associate director and chief financial officer of the Peel District School Board. He is also a founding member of the International Punjabi Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Takhar holds a Master's degree in economics and political science, and an undergraduate degree in English, economics and political science. He is also a Fellow of the Society of Management Accountants of Canada.

A resident of Mississauga for 29 years, he and his wife have two daughters.

Please join me in welcoming the Honourable Harinder Takhar.