

Remarks for
The Honourable Harinder Takhar,
Minister of Transportation
at the
International Conference on
Distracted Driving
8:30 a.m.
Toronto Hilton Hotel
Monday October 3, 2005

Key Messages:

- Ontario has the safest roads in North America. Our government is working hard to maintain and improve on that record.
- Driver distraction is a serious and growing concern on Ontario roads.
- The government is reviewing all emerging research and the effectiveness of laws in other jurisdictions that ban the use of cell phones while driving.
- We will continue working hard to increase public awareness about all forms of driver distraction.

Thank you Herb [Simpson President and CEO TIRF]

Good Morning.

It's great to come together like this to tackle a serious issue on Ontario roads – and around the world. Distracted driving is a growing concern.

In 2002, 7.9 per cent of all drivers involved in collisions in Ontario were not paying proper attention to the road. In 2003, that rose to 8.1 per cent.

Those numbers are gathered from police data. But they may not tell the whole story.

In the United States, it's estimated that driver distraction may be a contributing cause in between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions. It may cause as many as 10,000 deaths in the US every year – and cost nearly \$40 billion.

In this province, every collision involves a Motor Vehicle Accident Report or a Self-Report Collision Report. An investigation determines whether or not the “inattentive driver code” is recorded.

There is a perception that people talking on cell phones are a major cause of collisions on Ontario roads. People don't realize that drinking coffee while driving, or changing the radio or CD while driving, is also a distraction.

Our government is reviewing the collision forms. They may be revised to keep track of what types of driver distraction are a factor in collisions.

Before determining how to address this issue we need to consider the latest research.

That's why this conference is so important. I'm pleased that my ministry is a partner and co-sponsor. And I am especially honoured to give the opening remarks.

This conference brings all of the latest research on cell phones and other distracted driving issues under one roof. It also brings all of us who share an interest in the subject, together.

By working together, we improve our understanding and awareness of the problem.

Let me tell you what else my ministry is doing to curb distracted driving.

We're participating in a national working group on the subject.

We're reviewing the effectiveness of laws in other jurisdictions that ban the use of cell phones while driving.

We've developed the iDRIVE program – a video developed by young drivers for young drivers about the issues they face on the road, including distracted driving, and how to deal with those issues.

And last year I introduced the Child and Youth Safety Act – Bill 73.

Research shows new teenaged drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious crash when there are three or more teenage passengers in the car. The more teens in the car – the greater the risk of a collision.

Our bill restricts the number of teen passengers a new teen driver in this province can carry between the hours of midnight and five a.m. Thirty-one jurisdictions across North America have restrictions on new teen drivers. Restrictions went into effect September 1st in Ontario.

So you can see, I'm looking forward to the research unveiled at this conference. It could lead to better laws. And better laws make our roads safer.

There are tough penalties for not paying attention while driving.

Under Ontario's Highway Traffic Act, careless driving can mean a fine of up to \$1,000 and six demerit points. You could also lose your licence or wind up in jail.

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, dangerous driving can mean up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$2,000.

While our research on distracted driving and our tough laws make our roads safer ... getting the word out will save even more lives. That's why our government partners with the Ontario Provincial Police, police services and other safety partners to educate the public about the dangers of distracted driving.

I'm proud to say Ontario has the safest roads in North America. But distracted drivers are a threat to everyone on our roads. We need to get the word out – distracted drivers will not be tolerated.

I'm pleased to welcome you to the International Conference on Distracted Driving. I look forward to reviewing the research presented over the next three days – and any conclusions you may draw.

And to those of you who have travelled here from across Canada and around the world – Welcome to Ontario.

Thank you.