



NEWS RELEASE

November 24, 2005

Several Alberta companies adopt policies restricting employees' use of cell phones while driving

U of A students establish Coalition for Cell Phone-Free Driving to encourage people and companies to limit use of cell phones in vehicles

EDMONTON – A newly created, student-led initiative, The Coalition for Cell Phone-Free Driving, has convinced several prominent Alberta companies to adopt policies that restrict their employees' use of cell phones while driving.

Six corporate partners have officially signed on with a commitment to cell phone-free driving, including Halliburton, Tucker Wireline Services Canada, Sterling Crane, Shippers Supply Inc., Schlumberger and Hole's Greenhouses and Gardens Ltd. The coalition—spearheaded by several U of A graduate students—is hopeful more companies will adopt similar policies.

“Our company has made a corporate commitment to employee safety by not permitting them to use a cell phone, either hand-held or hands-free, while operating a motor vehicle on company business or on company time,” says Dave Snyder, President of Sterling Crane.

Injuries are the leading cause of death for people aged one to 44 years in Alberta; motor vehicle-related injuries account for the majority of these deaths. In Alberta, six people die every week in traffic collisions. Most motor vehicle collisions are the result of driver error.

“Thirteen months ago I lost my husband in a tragic, preventable collision,” explains Coalition supporter Annette Wolfer. “My husband was leaving a voicemail on the phone when he drove into a two-tonne truck on the opposite side of the road. He died before I could reach him to say good-bye.”

Several years ago, the Canadian Medical Association urged government to pass legislation banning cell phone use while driving. A Leger Marketing survey in 2001, found that 80 percent of Canadians favored a ban on cellular phone use while driving if not using the hands-free feature. And an academic paper by Donald Redelmeier, M.D. and Robert Tibshirani, Ph.D. in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997 found that cell phone users are four times more likely to be in a collision than non-users. Some 36 jurisdictions have passed legislation governing cell phone use in vehicles.

“Television portrays trauma and injuries as exciting, exhilarating and full of adrenaline rush,” says Dr. Eddie Chang, Emergency Medicine Physician and Trauma Team Leader for Capital Health. “However, the reality is that a traumatically injured patient’s life changes immediately when the injury occurs. If the patient is not killed, the injuries often have a lasting effect and can alter their life forever.”

The policy developed by the students stipulates that employees must ensure that, while driving, calls are directed to voicemail. If an employee must make an emergency 911 call, the vehicle should be parked in a safe location before making the call. Finally, Coalition members must ensure that all employees are made aware of the company policy and are expected to comply with it.

The Coalition hopes these corporate policies will not only result in fewer injuries in the work place, but that they will create safer habits that will spill over into employees’ everyday lives.

For more information contact:

Dr. Louis Francescutti
Director, Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research
780-492-5775

Cate Burant-Fernuik
Project Assistant, Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research
780-492-5775

Michael Robb, Director of Public Affairs
Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry
780-492-0647

Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research website:

<http://www.med.ualberta.ca/acicr/>

Transport Canada: cell phones and driving, questions and answers:

<http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/tp2436/rs200106/q-a.htm>

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador news release on cell phone use:

<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2002/gsl/1122n08.htm>

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