Gorski Consulting Website

Archived News - 2014 - January

January 31, 2014

Tyler Brooks-Szabo, Toby and Rebecca Van Lieshout - Names and Words and Not Much More

On October 25, 2013, another of many tragedies-in-life occurred on a suburban street in East London, Ontario which resulted in critical injuries to 10-year-old Tyler Brooks-Szabo.

Tyler was just a boy who happened to be on the sidewalk of Wexford Avenue in east London when a Chrysler car struck him and the driver reportedly fled the scene. Subsequently police laid charges against Toby and Rebecca Van Lieshout in relation to the events. Toby Van Lieshout pled guilty as the driver of the Chrysler and was sentenced by Justice Jeanine LeRoy to three-and-a-half years in prison.

Southerly view of white "X" chalk marks identifying the pre-crash yaw marks caused by the "Chrysler" as it travelled around a curve shortly before it travelled off the east (left) roadside and struck the Tyler Brooks.

While this might end with the official charges, the facts about what actually happened on the accident date have not been revealed. The only explanation for the events amounted to speculation by a news reporter who noted:

"Tire tracks and witness accounts suggest the southbound car may have veered across the street and hopped the curb, crossing the sidewalk for just a second, maybe even less, where it hit the boy before careening back onto the road and driving off."

This is about as detailed as the information will be for those of the public who would have questions about the uncommon occurrence. Did the collision occur as a result of alcohol involvement? Speeding? Inattention? These are the common factors used by police when they provide information to news media, but even this basic information was not noted.

The charges laid against Toby Van Lieshout were as follows:

-Leaving the scene of an accident causing bodily harm

-Possession of a schedule II substance

-Driving while under suspension

-Careless driving

-Using plate not authorized for vehicle

All these charges are serious but none relate to the actual collision events. Only the single charge of "Careless driving" refers to the actions of the driver with respect to the collision. But the actual departure of a roadway does not automatically relate to something inappropriate performed by a driver as there can be many reasons why a vehicle might leave a travelled road and some of these reasons may have nothing to do with a driver's fault. There has been no explanation provided as to how and why the departure of the vehicle was due to the driver's carelessness as opposed to, or in addition, to other factors.

If persons are to be convicted for causing a collision because they possessed drugs, or because they did not have a proper license, or they simply did not look pleasant, then so be it, our society has spoken. However, a properly functioning justice system needs to put all that extraneous matter aside and base its conclusions on the relevant facts. This is not easy or popular, but it is correct. The most difficult and courageous decisions are those made against the anger of a mob that has no time or interest in relevance.

We have observed that, in many stances, the families of the victims themselves are left puzzled, as the official proceedings move forward, yet no one takes the time to ask

whether the families understand what took place or whether they received all the information they needed.

The internet has improved the situation in the examination of many court decisions because some of the judgments of the higher courts are available on certain websites. For the rest a convenient spin is that the public already has the ability to know what happened because there was a public trial. So, if the public wanted to know, it could attend the trial. We still have some long miles to travel.

January 27, 2014

Deep Snow, Toddlers And A Young Mother's Determination

If you think you have it rough getting to work this morning, consider the following scene captured in east London.

A young mother would appear to have tried using a stroller to take her children along the side walk of Dundas Street at Highbury Avenue in London, Ontario this morning. As can be seen the attempt leaves the stroller on its side in the deep snow of the sidewalk. One toddler is safe in the arms of mother while a second toddler is stuck in snow precariously close to heavy traffic.

Deep snow on the sidewalk appears too much for a mother with two toddlers as their mode of transportation, a stroller, appears to have crashed into its side. A struggling toddler tries to make her way to mother.

As can be seen below, one of the toddlers attempts to cross the deep snow to get to its mother.

The lone toddler makes a valiant attempt to cross the mountainous terrain to reach mother.

We have all likely experienced a moment in our lives when the task is too great and we need to sit down, as did the little one below. Luckily there is a mother to save the day.

As the mountains are too steep and the craters are too deep, mother comes to the rescue.

Mother gives a helping hand...

But as the task is too great she finally decides to lift the child...

When the going gets too rough mother attempts to carry both of her parcels at once.

And the human elevator raises the child….

Up we go, as mother attempts to lift both children.

Though the struggle continues, mother is persistent…

There is momentary success as mother triumphs.

…and presses on…

But the struggle is difficult...

With a sudden slip one of the children slips out of mother's arms. But, while balancing on one foot, she lifts her leg and catches the child before lifting it up into safety again.

There is a momentary setback and one child slips out of mother's arms. But, like a being of multiple limbs she uses her leg to catch the child before it falls, while balancing on one leg.

Our little story ends with the mother leaving the stroller behind as she continues carrying both children through the deep snow.

We hope this reminds some of us, as we pull out of our garages, in our fully warmed-up cars, that there are many amongst us who have to struggle tremendously just to get from point A to point B. There was no one there to stand up and applaud this mother's determination.

Calvin Willard Identified as Deceased Man Found in Submerged Pick-up Truck South of Exeter Ontario

When the plot thickens it also gets murkier...

It remains unclear why there seems to be a lack of information stemming from the January 24th, 2014 finding of a body of a man in a submerged GMC Pick-up truck near the intersection of Maguire Road and Mooresville Road, south of Exeter, Ontario. The only real information that has been released is that the deceased was identified as 54-year-old Calvin Willard of South Huron.

Reportedly, police found parts of the truck on the road suggesting that there had been a collision before the truck became submerged. But it has not been explained what parts were found, what portion of the vehicle they came from, where the parts were located with respect to the rest position of the vehicle, where the collision occurred with respect to the intersection, and so on and so on...

Sun Media reporter Jennifer O'Brien indicated that she asked police if the truck struck a deer and the police response was that they were not sure. They were also not sure about when the collision events occurred.

It is not clear why police are not asking for the help of possible witnesses. Surely the deceased would likely be known to persons in the area and might be able to shed light on when they saw the person last, or similar facts that might help the investigation. As time passes the possibility that persons might recall something of importance may diminish or certain witnesses may leave the area if they were just passing through so the opportunity of obtaining their information could be lost.

The location and pattern of distribution of debris at an accident site can be as important as the location and severity of deformation on the vehicle. If there were parts that were separated from the struck vehicle then it should be possible to determine whether the impact was with another vehicle or with something like a deer. So it is unusual that police would state that they cannot make that determination.

In wintery conditions evidence may exist on the roadway but it may be covered the continual snowfall. It is possible to bring in equipment to melt the snow in the area and therefore reveal evidence that might not be initially apparent. However there is no information whether such attempts have been made by police.

The secrecy behind the police actions would lead one to wonder whether facts about the case are being unreported because there is more to this story than meets the eye.

January 26, 2014

Body of Driver Found in Partially Submerged Pick-up Truck South-West of Exeter Ontario - No Other Information Made Public

While it could be understood that police might know very little when they come across a driver who is deceased in a partially submerged vehicle, a little more information about the occurrence could have been provided to the public in case someone witnessed something of importance.

On January 24th, 2014, news media reported that a GMC pick-up truck was found partially submerged in the river/creek near the intersection of Mooresville Road and Maguire Road. This intersection is a low-travelled area south of Exeter and only a couple of kilometres to the west of the main highway, Highway 4, that runs north/south from London and St. Thomas toward Owen Sound on Georgian Bay.

News media reported that the truck "appeared to have damage consistent with a motor vehicle collision". It is such phrasing that is of little use to anyone. It would help if there was a little information about the location of the damage and whether it was consistent with a collision with another vehicle or consistent with contact of the local environment (trees, barriers, etc.). Such details might help to jog someone's memory about what they might have seen. The driver has not been identified so that, if any witness had such a memory, the possibility that the witness would come forward deteriorates with the delayed time.

Winter Storms and Cold Continue to Attack Road Systems in South-Western Ontario Region

It would appear we have a mis-understanding of the effects of global warming as south-western Ontario has been experiencing an unusually long series of bitter cold fronts and storms reminiscent of the 1970s.

Children were not the only ones who needed a helping hand Saturday, January 25th, 2014 as very strong blowing winds made one feel blown away like a leaf. Such strong winds were the true challenge on area roads.

It was the very strong winds that were the true culprit in the last few days as the fallen snow was thrown into large snow drifts shortly after the passing of a snow plow.

This sidewalk snow plow would appear to be plowing its way into the "Timmies" (Tim Hortons donut outlet) on Highbury Avenue and Hamilton Road, in London, Ontario, on January 25th. Snow plow operators were put to the test in the last several days as snow was blown back onto the areas that has just been cleared making the variable conditions extremely difficult to predict and therefore dangerous for drivers.

Several Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) cruisers were struck by traffic on Highway 401 as the police were stopped to deal with previous collisions. While the police work is essential it is also extremely dangerous, even with emergency lights activated, for police vehicles to be stopped on high-speed expressways. It was very common to see numerous vehicles in the ditches and medians of local highways.

A typical example, westbound on Highway 402, east of Colonel Talbot Road, where an eastbound vehicle was unable to negotiate the curve of the highway and ended up in the median.

Closer view of Pick-up truck stuck in the median of Highway 402 east of Colonel Talbot Road. An unloaded pick-up truck like this has greater difficulty maintaining stability in these wind-swept conditions.

Although major highways such as the 401 and 402 were in reasonable condition, the ramps leading to and off the lanes were a different matter. Snow drifted onto these ramps making it difficult to enter and exit the highways.

Example of the Highway 401 entrance ramp from Highbury Avenue to westbound Highway 401, showing the snow that has drifted into the ramp lane making it difficult for vehicles to accelerate into the flow of traffic.

Yet, traffic on the expressways could travel at reasonably high speeds of many sections because of the appearance of the excellent (bare and dry) surface conditions. These drivers would be suddenly confronted with strong winds and snow drifts that would require quick reductions in speed and therefore the reason for many collisions.

Many sections of the expressways such as Highway 401 and 402 were in excellent condition for brief distances such as shown in this example travelling westbound on Highway 401 and approaching Highway 402, south-west of London, Ontario.

January 20, 2014

Minimal Information Provided With Respect To "Criminal" Charge Laid By SIU Against London City Police Officer In October 6, 2013 Crash at Adelaide & Oxford Streets

It has not been explained why Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) proceeded to lay a "criminal" dangerous driving charge against London City Police Constable Leah Constance Laari with respect to a collision that occurred at approximately 1100 hours on October 6, 2013 at the intersection of Adelaide Street and Oxford Street, in London, Ontario. It was reported that Constable Laari's cruiser was southbound on Adelaide Street and responding to a "robbery call" when it struck a black Toyota that was eastbound on Oxford Street. The Toyota subsequently struck two pedestrians who sustained injuries.

Photos of the Toyota at its final rest position indicated two, large, areas of spider-web fracture in its front windshield which would be characteristic of impact by such pedestrians however no information was provided with that regard. The extent of the injuries was also confused as London's CTV News reported that both pedestrians sustained minor injuries whereas the SIU reported that one of the pedestrians, a 23-year-old woman, remained in hospital although her injuries were not life-threatening.

In other photos, the police cruiser is shown within the south pedestrian crossing lines, thus, given that the Toyota would have been in either of the two eastbound lanes, would indicate that the Cruiser's centre-of-mass would not have travelled much more than 10 metres beyond the area of impact, and likely far less than 10 metres. Meanwhile, the cruiser's counter-clockwise rotation of about 300 degrees would indicate that the lateral force on its front end would be substantial while the longitudinal force created from its forward velocity would not be large. So our point is, without having the measurements that would typically accompany a formal reconstruction, the cruiser was likely not travelling at a large speed at impact and the Toyota was travelling faster than the cruiser.

The laying of "criminal" charges in such a traffic collision would appear to be unusual and should, at least, have included a brief explanation, while none was provided. Constable Laari is to appear in court on February 27, 2014 to respond to the charge.

January 19, 2014

Driver Actions While Travelling Around a Complicated, Snow-Covered, Rural S-Curve

Driving on low-volume, rural highways in winter can pose some challenges especially when the road surface is covered with snow, the driver may be travelling on an unfamiliar road and the road geometry is often not ideal. In an article that we have posted to the Articles page of this website we review a situation where our test vehicle passed through an S-curve on a low-volume, snow-covered rural road while the vehicle was equipped with nine video cameras to show the vehicle's motion and the driver's actions. We also discuss some of the theoretical problems that could be encountered in this scenario.

The views from nine video cameras are combined here under a video editting project wherein we can study the motions of the vehicle and the actions of the driver as they travel through a complicated, snow-covered, S-curve on a rural highway.

January 18, 2014

Triple Tractor-Trailer Collision on Highway 401 East of Drumbo Becomes Deadly

Although not emphasized, the circumstances preceding a fatal collision involving three transport trucks on Highway 401 yesterday were likely complicated by the shutting down of two of the highway's three lanes due to a previous collision. Whenever such lane reductions occur there is always a serious threat that rear-end collisions will occur and this is what would appear to have occurred when two trucks rear-ended a third.

It is not explained why the driver of one of the trucks was reported to sustain "serious" injuries but eventually died. Normally persons who sustain injuries that could "probably" die from those injuries are described as sustaining "life-threatening injuries" not "serious injuries". So it is not certain whether there were additional facts about this story that have not been revealed.

The drivers of transport trucks have a particular difficulty bringing their heavy rigs to a stop in the same time and distance as smaller vehicles and this is a constant problem when high speed highways such as the 401 are suddenly blocked causing traffic to come

to a halt. On good road conditions these large trucks generally decelerate at a maximum rate of less than 0.5 g while typical deceleration values for passenger cars with ABS might achieve .8 to 1.0 g or even higher. This means that, from a speed of 110 km/h, in good road conditions the car can stop in less than 50 metres. In contrast the truck needs more than 100 metres of stopping braking distance.

When a road surface becomes snow-covered, even by a thin layer of a 1/2 inch (1 centimetre), its character deteriorates rapidly in terms of providing traction needed to bring vehicles to a stop. In those instances a passenger car with ABS might generate a deceleration rate as low as 0.15 g and a truck much less so. This can occur for example, when the snow is compressed into a thin, hard layer that mimics the character of ice. Now, from an initial speed of 110 km/h, that same car needs about 300 metres to stop. Yet, research indicates that, a passenger car observed from a distance of 300 metres would only be about 1 inch tall when its replica is placed before us at a distance of 5 metres (five large steps) in front of us. That is an extremely small object from which a driver is asked to determine whether that object is stopped or in motion. Research indicates that we typically need to be in the range of 175 metres away from such a car before we can reliably detect its rate of deceleration. Yet a layer of snow that is half an inch deep is deemed insufficient to bring out any plowing, salting or sanding operations according to the Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS) recently legislated in Ontario.

While drivers should evaluate their speed according to the present conditions, there are instances where road surface conditions change rapidly, especially when snow is drifted onto a highway in a very localized area. It is not surprising that, in those conditions, severe rear-end collisions might occur, particularly involving large transport trucks.

January 17, 2014

OPP Police SUV In Lambton County Involved in a Rollover Collision

Minimal information was available from the official news agencies, however, a Lambton OPP police cruiser "rolled into a ditch" while travelling northbound on Oil Heritage Road, near LaSalle Line, on January 16th, 2014, around 1830 hours. It was reported that the officer was taken to hospital and was treated for non-life-threatening injuries.

The specific location of the collision was not noted. However the portion of Oil Heritage Road near LaSalle Line contains some dangerously steep slopes and deep ditches. While some of the worst areas are protected by post and wire barriers there are several areas where a loss-of-control vehicle could result in dangerous decelerations and overturning into water where a driver could drown.

It was on October 3, 2013 that we posted an article to our website where we examined the site of another rollover of a Lambton OPP vehicle on Courtright Line. At that time we indicated that the two officers were lucky that the vehicle came to rest in the

shallower south ditch rather than the much deeper, and water-filled, north ditch. In that incident the cruiser was travelling extremely quickly and entered into an area of road surface that was poor quality.

It is unknown what transpired in the present case and we suspect that no further information will be revealed. However fortunate these outcomes may be, they should not be taken lightly. Hopefully, police are examining both incidents, to evaluate what can be done, to lessen the chances that police will have to depend on luck to get them through their day.

Transporting Snow - Just So That We Can?

We notice a number of drivers continue to deliver snow from one destination to another. It would be reasonable if this courier delivery was packaged and stored in a trunk or cargo hold. But instead they leave it caked on their windshields or packed on the roof of their car. While driving the snow eventually blows away into someone else's windshield, either behind them, or approaching them, as shown in the example below.

An example of driving in a self-made fog.

This photo brings new meaning to the term "cargo" van, as additional snow cargo is apparently being transported for some official reason.

January 16, 2014

IIHS Small Overlap Crash Test (SOCT) Is Good - But Might Also Be Not So Good

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) should be complimented for their work in improving the safety performance of North American vehicles over the last several decades. We have been impressed with their attempt to further improve the driver safety by introducing a new barrier impact test as part of their ratings of the TOP SAFETY PICKs.

We have made mention, on a number of previous occasions, that the traditional barrier impact tests performed by federal governments do not replicate the actual collision performance of vehicles in real-life crashes. However we understand that this is a growing process.

In the early years of the 1970's and 80s governments employed the traditional 30 mph full frontal impact into a rigid, immovable barrier. Given the times this was acceptable

considering what preceded it. In the 1980's we recall a visit by Mercedes Benz to the Annual Society of Automotive Engineers Congress in Detroit where they demonstrated the 50% over-lap tests they were performing on their vehicles. As a comparison they demonstrated the difference between the performance of their cars and that of a North American product, possibly a GM X-body type. The 50% over-lap crash test of that GM X-body demonstrated how the vehicle seemed to explode before the viewers eyes as there was massive intrusion into the driver's space that would surely have resulted in fatal injuries. Soon afterward we saw the North American feds introducing that test to their series. Whether they already had plans to do so before Mercedes came along we do not know. But things were improving. And other impact tests were also developed over time.

However, we always observed how the controlled tests were questionable in their procedures as it was not clear how close they came to replicating the results of real-life collisions. When the "crabbed" side impact test was introduced in the late 1980s we observed how the angled approach of the impact sled caused a nice triangular depth of crush into the driver's side of the target vehicle. However we also observed that the test failed to consider that, in real life, the bullet vehicle (crabbed sled) does not approach and maintain a consistent angle. In fact the bullet vehicle comes in at a 90 degree angle and then rotates into the so-called crabbed position, producing the maximum penetration at the rear of the direct-contact zone and therefore producing the "triangular" crush. This rotation makes a substantial difference in the character of the stress put on the side structure. We recognized that the structural failures that be observed in real-life collisions would not be revealed in the government test because the stresses were different.

We complained that the 50% over-lap frontal impact was still not replicating the type of real-life collisions that cause intrusion and death. We speculated that government agencies were aware of this as agencies such as NASS in the U.S. and similar research teams in Canada were providing information on thousands of real-life collisions into government data banks and it would be easy for anyone with any marginal experience with reviewing this data that drivers were dying in very different ways that than even the 50% overlap test was able to demonstrate.

So we were quite impressed when, it seemed out of the blue, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) appeared to demonstrate that they knew exactly what we knew because they introduced their Small Overlap Crash Test (SOCT). This test had the potential of demonstrating that a number or real-life fatalities occur when the struck vehicle sustains direct contact at a narrow portion of the front end whereby much the designed crumple zone, located further into the centre of the vehicle, is evaded and that narrow portion of the left structure is compressed all the way back into the driver's seating space. Sure enough IIHS produced a test that mimicked that result. And even in their latest STATUS REPORT newsletter they state:

"The test replicates what happens when the front corner of a vehicle collides with another vehicle or an object like a tree or utility pole. Although this type of crash is

responsible for many deaths and serious injuries, it wasn't addressed by other frontal tests conducted by IIHS or the federal government."

When we see this valiant attempt by IIHS it is difficult to be critical, we do not wish to be, and we wish there was another way to make our comment. However, the IIHS still does not appear to have it right. As we have stated before, many of these small overlap frontal impacts have historically come when a vehicle rotates out of control into the path of an opposing vehicle. It is this pre-crash rotation that this the difference maker between the real-life collision and the controlled test. In the real-life collision it is this rotation that causes more sideways penetration the further the crush progresses rearward toward the driver's seated area. Although we do not have any specific information about the IIHS test, the photos shown in their STATUS REPORT suggest that the test vehicle is driven into an immovable narrow object and there is no rotation of either of the contacting bodies.

We are aware that newer vehicle models are, and increasingly will be, equipped with stability control systems. We believe this will mean that, when a vehicle enters into a state of loss-of-control, it may still cross over the roadway centre-line but that there will be less yaw (rotation) and so the traditional loss-of-control collision that we used to see may no longer be as apparent and perhaps the IIHS SOCT may be more representative of real life than we say.

If nothing else, we can be satisfied that the procedures are headed in the right direction, even though not as quickly as everyone would like.

January 14, 2014

Explanation That Deceased Pedestrian Landed Inside Cab of Striking Pick-up Appears Fishier Than Most Fish In The Sea

The meandering explanation of the death of a pedestrian who was struck by a pick-up truck near Brockville, Ontario is bazaar on its own. But even when the fairy tale was reportedly unravelled, the explained facts remain fishy. The story goes like this...

Two young men, Rusty Pearce (driver), 22 and Joseph Greer (right front passenger), 24, are riding in Greer's Dodge pick-up truck. Greer was "heavily intoxicated" while Pearce had some alcohol and a line of cocaine. They strike a skateboarder who is in their lane. The skateboarder ends up inside the cab of the Pick-up. They drive around with the body in the cab where they then dump it off near a skate park to make it look like the death occurred in another manner. Pearce remains behind to call 911 while Greer drives away.

Eventually the ruse unravels and the two admit to the "true" story. But is the true story actually true, or just another ruse? Some parts of this explanation could be true but the

idea that the struck skateboarder flew into the cab of the pick-up truck while being struck is not believable.

Consider that an average male with normal shoes would have a centre-of-gravity just over 1 metre and, adding a skateboard height might increase that centre-of-gravity to about 1.1 metres. While higher speed impacts of pedestrians by passenger cars can cause the pedestrian's body to slide up the hood with resultant head contact in the windshield, it is rare that the full body is able to slide so far that we see an actual body impact into the windshield. The situation with a pick-up truck is even more revealing.

Height of pedestrians versus height of the front end of a passenger car. A pick-up truck front end would be substantially higher.

The bottom edge of the windshield of a 2005 Dakota Pick-up truck would be in the range of 1.35 metres while its overall height would be in the range of 1.74 metres. This does not include any lift kits or oversize tires that are common with pick-ups. While we do not have any specifications nearby regarding the height of the front edge of the vehicle's hood it would certainly be higher than the 1.1 metre height of a pedestrian's centre-of-gravity. This is why, when a substantial impact occurs between a pick-up truck and an adult pedestrian there is typically a large proportion of the impact energy dissipated through crushing at the vehicle's grille and front edge of the hood. In extreme situations the pedestrian could slide up the hood and head contact with the windshield could be possible. But the possibility that the whole body of a pedestrian could ride up so high, and still have enough difference in velocity to penetrate through the thick inter-layer of a windshield and enter a pick-up truck's cab is, in our opinion, a story about winning the Derby on a three-legged pony named "Impossible". While truth can be

stranger than fiction, the only way we could believe that a pedestrian would avoid the high front end of a pick-up truck in this manner is if the pedestrian attempted to high jump the vehicle. But that would be extremely difficult to synchronize with the high speed that would be required of that pick-up truck.

While knowing how the pedestrian got into the truck's cab might appear to be trivial, one can never tell when exposing the actual truth can cause the collapse of the rest of the "truth" of this bazaar tale.

January 12, 2014

Red Light Cameras Result In Benefits and Draw-Backs While Their Secrecy Nurtures Paranoia

Jeff Outhit, a reporter with the Kitchener Record Newspaper, has continued his outstanding service to his community with a series of articles high-lighting a variety of road safety and traffic issues that educate the public.

When a person is injured or killed a red light camera at an intersection can provide unquestionable facts about what happened. But are there also draw backs to their installation. Jeff Outhit of the Kitchener Record newspaper has examined the issue.

In his most recent Kitchener Record article, "Camera ahead - hit the brakes or hit the gas?" (January 11, 2014), Outhit addresses the issue of red light cameras at intersections

and whether they are a benefit. He uses analysis of local collision data as well as research from other agencies, like the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, to explain the benefits and problems of installing cameras that snap the image of any vehicle that travels through an intersection on a red signal. The research suggests that red light cameras reduce the number or "right angle" collisions while increasing the number or rear end collisions. While Gorski Consulting does not support all of Mr. Outhit's conclusions much of his work is based on objective data and he provides a clear outline of where the data comes from. When he draws a conclusion he provides the source data (actual numbers of incidents) that led to the conclusion.

A substantial number of collisions were examined by Outhit: "...243 collisions for review at 12 cameras (locations). Results are compared to 10,966 collisions at 304 traffic signals that lack cameras but have comparable (traffic) volumes". Yet, in our opinion, there are still too few observations of collisions in the discussion to allow conclusions to be made whether the benefit or detriment is real or simply the result of chance variance. The quoted numbers of local collisions in the discussion, such as 12 in one year versus 7 in the next, are too small to allow one to say that the difference is due to the presence/absence of red light cameras. Yet the discussion is intriguing and causes the public to think.

Often, reports of the costs of operating red light cameras are too narrow in that they focus on activities such as making sure the cameras are operating properly, the cost to pay analysts to monitor the cameras, and so on. However we see a broader picture of those costs. For example, in our field of activity, we are asked by various clients to determine who was at fault in intersection collisions and much of our success depends on the quality of evidence that we can work with. Intersection collisions are particularly bothersome in that our techniques can determine facts such as speed or collision severity but it is difficult to develop solid evidence that a particular party travelled through a red light. On a number of occasions we have observed innocent persons who have sustained life-altering injuries, or have died, yet the guilty person who was speeding and entered the intersection on a red light was not uncovered.

The entrance of a vehicle into an intersection on a red traffic signal can have devastating consequences therefore it is vitally important to obtain red light camera images to confirm a driver's guilt.

There is a great reduction in our costs when an objective image is made available from a red light camera. These cost reductions filter down to reduced costs by insurance personnel who handle this cases, lawyers who are retained to argue these cases, and likely a reduction in court costs as the matters are likely to proceed through court much quicker if they ever arrive there at all. Unfortunately few members of the public are exposed to these facts and do not appreciate these benefits.

On the negative side, Mr. Outhit's article hit the nail on the head when he quoted the comments of a driver, Peter Crichton, of Waterloo, Ontario:

"Crichton has not been ticketed but is suspicious of cameras, in part because they are operated by a private firm paid just over $500,000 a year to operate them. He was recently flashed by a camera in Waterloo — while driving through a green light, he says.

Alarmed, he doubled back and was told he would not be ticketed, by a technician who was working on the camera. The technician told him the flash was a test, but would not identify himself or further discuss the camera.

The secrecy bothers Crichton, who's concerned that cameras may be about revenue.

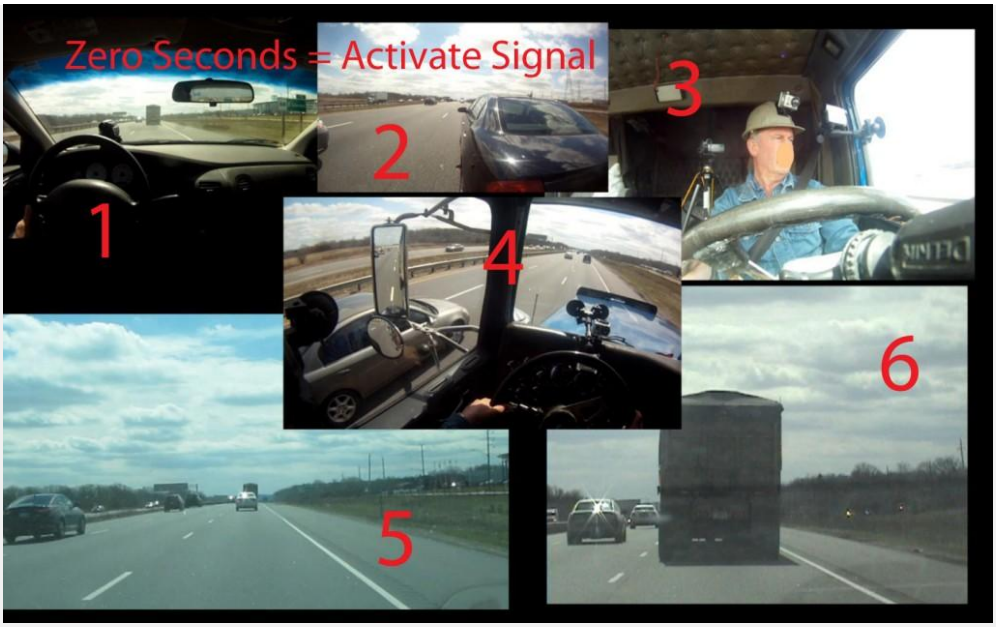
"I wondered what oversight is there from the region, or from just regular people, that these are at the very least calibrated the same everywhere?" he said."

The cost of camera operation must consider the cost in the reduction of personal privacy and the "paranoia factor" that is caused in the general public that is not provided with enough information or control over how these cameras are operated. When the general public is kept out the loop like this there is a large detriment that is unrealized and unrecognized by politicians and City staff who control their use. Simply satisfying the beliefs of the politicians or staff that everything is above board is clearly not enough. As the old phrase goes: "It is not sufficient that justice be done, but that justice must be seen to be done". When a few make secret decisions for the many it becomes a classic big brother society that we believe is the largest detriment of all.

January 11, 2014

Time Required for a Tractor-Trailer to Complete a Lane Change

The motions of tractor-trailers on our road system are often scrutinized as the collisions involving these massive vehicles can cause catastrophic consequences. A common question is the time required for a tractor-trailer to complete a lane change on a multi-lane highway. Gorski Consulting has been involved in real-life testing using several vehicles and multiple video cameras to explore some of these motion questions. We have prepared an article, which has been uploaded to the Articles page of this website, that discusses the detailed motions of a tractor-trailer as well as the motions of other vehicles around it when the tractor-trailer performs a lane change.



A screenshot from a video project showing the views from six video cameras that were mounted to three test vehicles, including a tractor-trailer, that were used by Gorski Consulting to study the motions of the tractor-trailer on a multi-lane highway.

January 9, 2014

Oxford OPP Police Cruiser Reportedly Strikes Loaded School Bus But Details Not Revealed

Minimal information has been provided by news media with respect to the collision of an Oxford OPP police cruiser and a loaded school bus at the intersection of Oxford Road 33 and 16th Line. While the collision reportedly occurred at 0900 hours this morning the London Free Press did not post an article on the incident until almost 1700 hours. It is reported that police investigators had the intersection closed for about five hours. The article reported that no one was injured yet a photo of the front end of the cruiser while on the flat bed of a tow truck indicated there was extensive front end damage.

January 8, 2014

Collision at Intersection of Kerwood Road and Egremont Drive North-West of London, Ontario.

It is reported that a collision occurred on the late afternoon of Tuesday, January 7, 2014 at the intersection of Kerwood Road and Egremont Drive north-west of London, Ontario. A southbound tractor-trailer was governed by a stop-sign and entered the intersection where it collided with an eastbound pick-up truck. The trailer of the large truck rolled onto its side while the tractor remained upright. The pick-up truck was badly damaged and the its driver reportedly sustained life-threatening injuries.

The photo below was taken on November 28, 2013 from the viewpoint of an eastbound driver of a passenger car. The eyes of such a driver would be in the range of 120 centimetres above the road surface. The eyes of the driver of a pick-up truck might be in the range of 150 centimetres above the road surface although that could vary substantially due to any suspension alterations which are common on pick-up trucks.

View, looking eastbound, while travelling east on Egremont Drive and approaching the intersection of Kerwood Road. Note that there is a slight viewing obstruction due to a small hillcrest before reaching the Kerwood Road intersection. This photo was taken on November 28, 2013.

Note in the above photo that there is a slight viewing obstruction for drivers who cannot see Kerwood Road from this location. Yet this is still a long distance away from the intersection. The photo below shows the view once drivers crest the hillcrest. For example, the yellow warning sign on the right side of this view is usually about 150 metres away from an intersection and you count the number of dashed lines (3 metres long) and spaces between the dashes (6 metres long) of the centre-line to estimate how far it is from where this photo was taken to the location of that warning sign.

Eastbound view along Egremont Drive on approach to the intersection at Kerwood Road.

A closer view of the intersection is shown below.

View, looking east, along Egremont Drive on approach to the intersection at Kerwood Road.

And below is a view along Egremont Drive just as the camera is passing through the intersection of Kerwood Road.

View, looking east on Egremont Drive while passing through the intersection at Kerwood Road.

It is not possible to determine why the collision occurred yesterday at this intersection without further information.

January 7, 2014

Driving For The Road Conditions - How Well Can We Detect Snow Drifts?

We have uploaded a new article to the Articles page of this website in which we discuss the problem of detecting isolated snow drifts on a rural highway. In many instances the danger of snow on a road is not just based on the quantity of new snowfall but that, in certain situations, old snow can drift onto the road in an isolated location while the remainder of the road appears to be bare and dry.

Can a driver reasonably detect an isolated snow drift in time to prevent it from affecting the stability of the vehicle?

We argue that Ontario's Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS) fail to address this issue as they allow maintenance personnel to discontinue inspections of all roads in their jurisdiction in favour of inspecting only a select group of "representative" roads and then deploy resources only after a certain depth of new snow has accumulated. We argue that, when a road is left physically uninspected by a road inspector it will not be possible to detect those isolated instances of drifted snow. In those instances municipalities will claim the defense that they followed the legislation (MMS) and therefore they are immune from civil litigation, to the detriment of an insignificant number of victims who do not possess the politician power to change such an injustice.

Wind Chill of -42 Degrees Celsius Not Something To Play With

The morning of January 7, 2014 brings residents in London, Ontario with the reality that it is dangerously cold out there. Environment Canada indicates the temperature dropped to -26 Celsius with a Wind Chill value of -42 Celsius. Exposed skin would be expected to freeze in about 5 minutes. In these conditions it would be unwise to venture out unless absolutely essential.

Temperature sign at Richmond and Oxford in London, Ontario indicates -24 Celsius at approximately 0830 hours. With winds blowing at 50 to 60 km/h the wind chill is naturally much lower.

Schools in the London area have been closed and Western University in London has cancelled classes. Yet, Western University has made the judgment that it should stay open and that staff should come into work. It is these kinds of unnecessary plays with unforgiving nature that could lead to tragedy. With the number of University employees making the trek into work it is possible that some might get stranded. Any persons being stranded in these extreme conditions are in real jeopardy of losing their life. Common sense should dictate that nothing is so important that we place the lives of many in front of nature's gun barrel.

A vehicle is immobilized in the snow bank at the intersection of Clarke Road and Fanshawe Park Road in London, Ontario on the morning of January 7th, 2014. In extreme wind chills, and if the driver is unprepared, this can be a life-threatening issue.

Another immobilized vehicle in the ditch of Clarke Road at the south end of the bridge of the north branch of the Thames River.

We advise, despite official calls by employers to come into work, workers should consider simply staying home.

January 6, 2014

London Police Services Launches "RAIDS ONLINE" Website to Inform the Public of Reported Crimes and Traffic Incidents

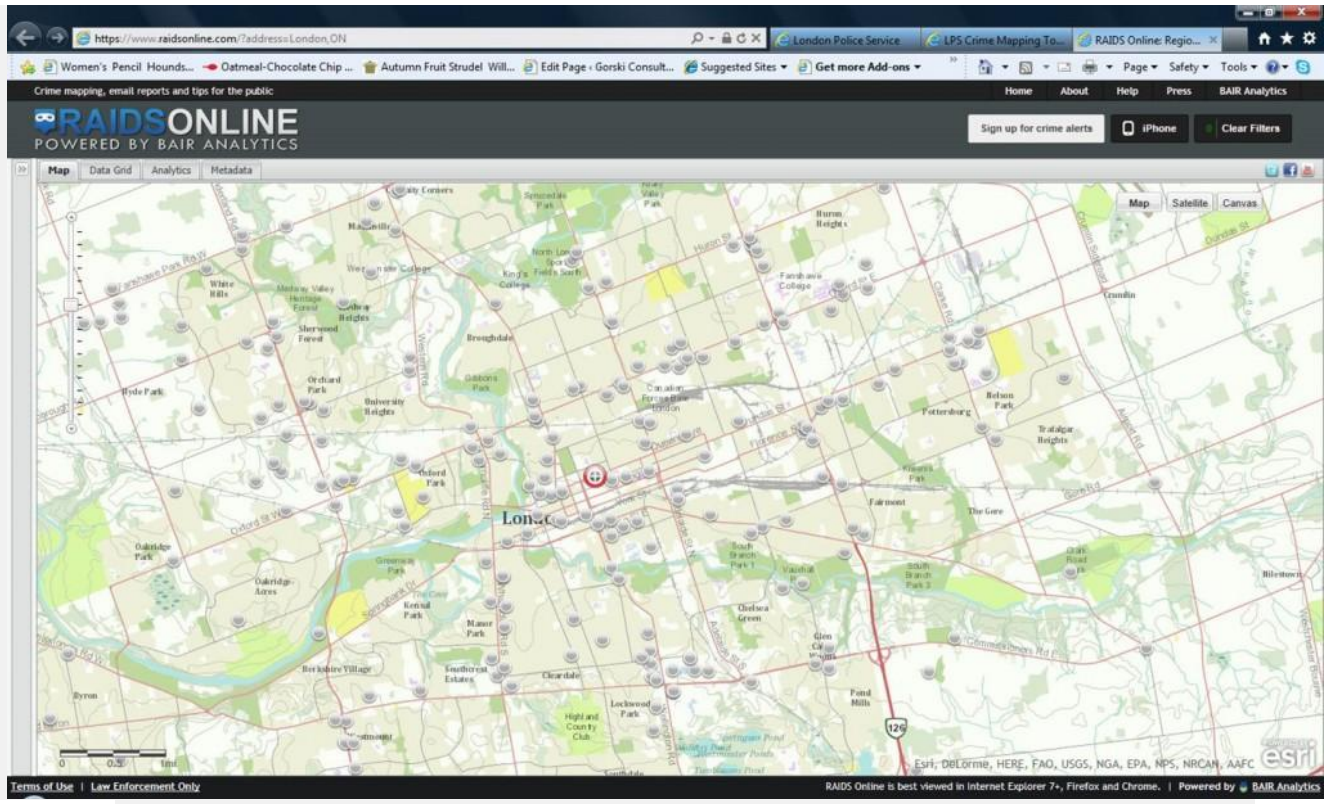
It is still unclear how a new London City Police website will function for the benefit of the City, however the new RAIDS ONLINE website is expected to help solve and prevent crimes by creating a better-informed public. The general introduction on the website mentions the following:

"The London Police Service has contracted with Bair Analytics Inc. to provide online crime mapping service to the public.

This interactive crime map includes crime data related to auto thefts, thefts from vehicles, break and enters, robberies, and motor vehicle collisions. Each occurrence is represented by an icon that, when selected, will reveal information about each reported crime such as the time and date, offence type, and an off-set address for the event. Icons for off-set addresses do not represent the actual location where the incident occurred.

The police occurrence information upon which the crime map and related analytical data are created is based upon preliminary information of police occurrence type. Offence types and related addresses often change during the investigative process. The information is provided only as a general overview of crime in the city of London."

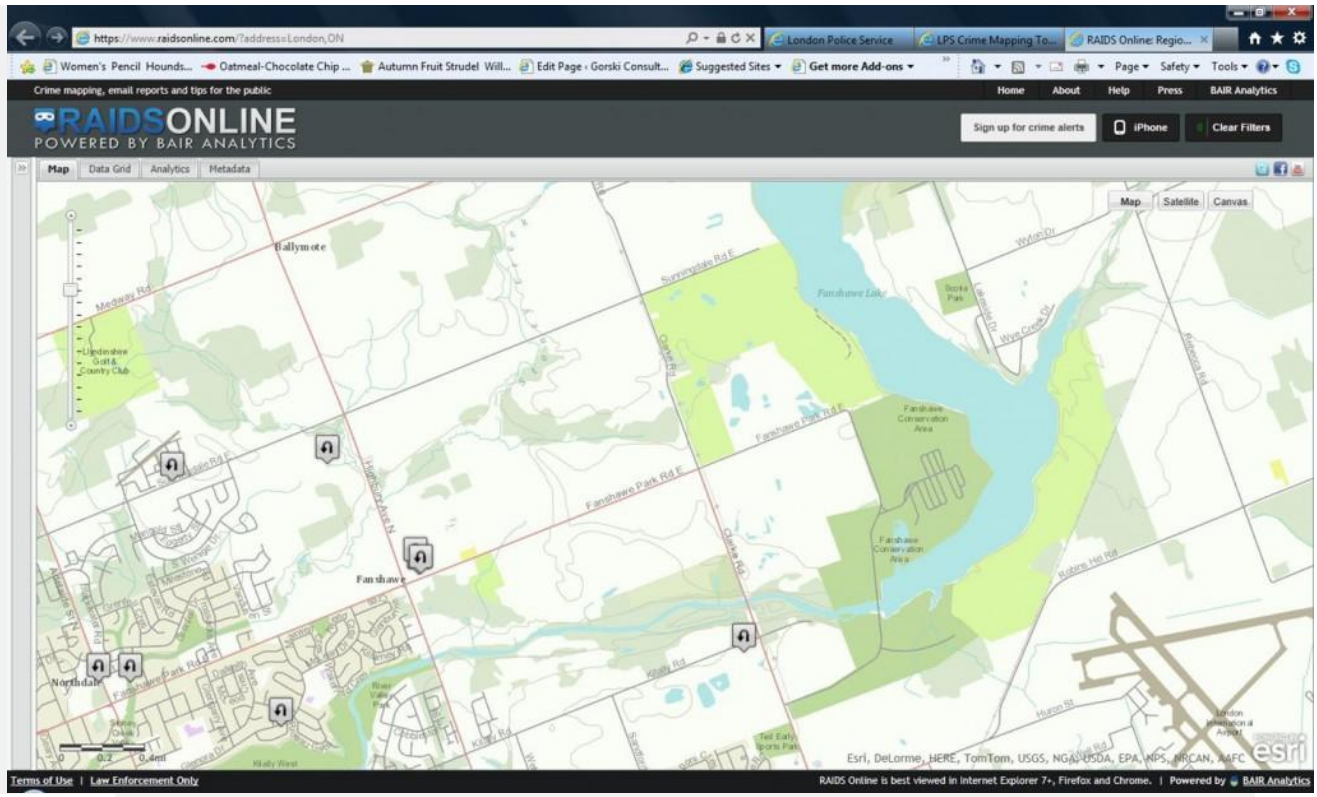
As experts in motor vehicle safety research and traffic accident reconstruction we are less interested in the details of crimes presented on the website. However it is advertised that the website posts "traffic incidents" and this captured our curiosity. As a test of the system we requested a display of all traffic incidents in London for the past 4 years and obtained the following map.



Overall view of "Traffic Incidents" in London, Ontario as displayed by the London Police Service RAIDS ONLINE website.

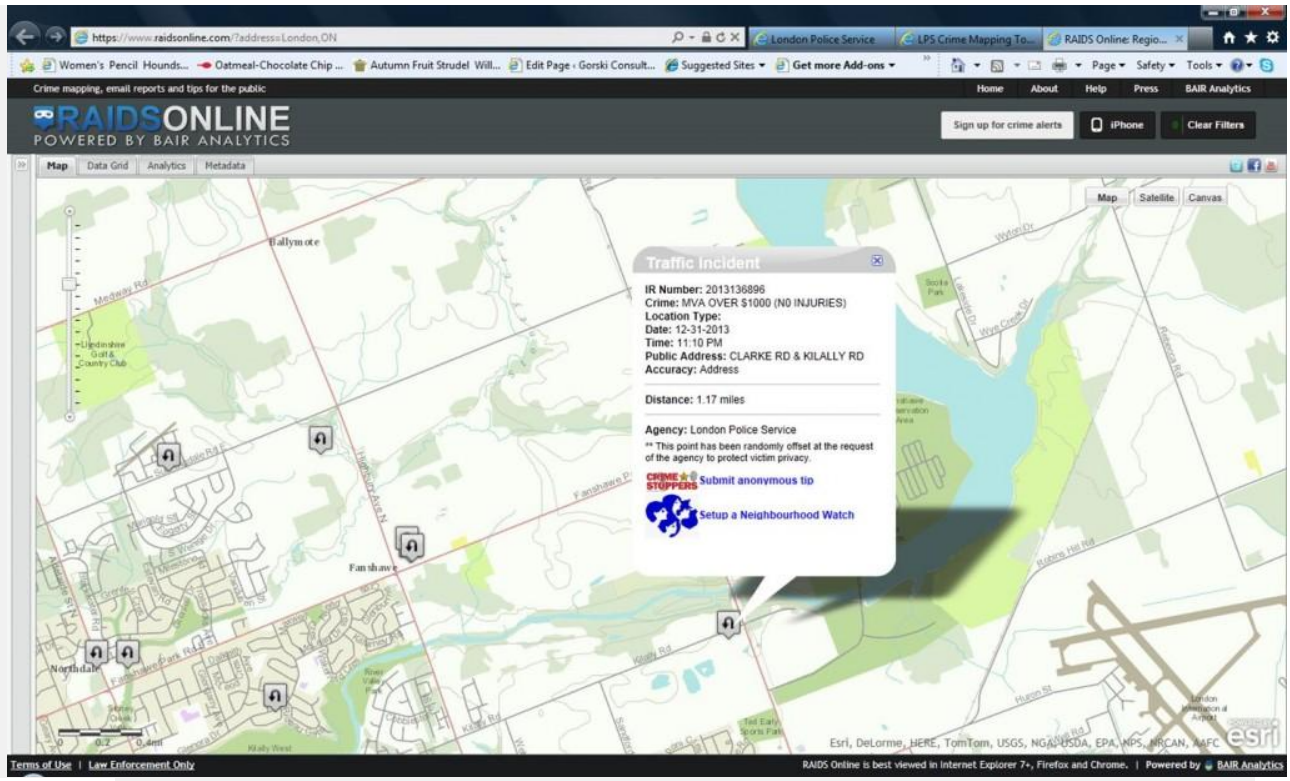
There are small, gray icons at various locations of the map which we understand are the individual locations of collisions. However the numbers of those icons suggests that this data does not show all the collisions in the past 4 years. Closer scrutiny of the website such as discussed on a London Free Press article, suggests that the data only contains information about the previous 3 months of incidents. It is not clear whether the website will permanently operate in this fashion (i.e. only displaying the previous 3 month's incidents) or whether this is just the beginning of the data entry operations and that eventually a history of collisions for several years might be available.

We have been particularly interested in obtaining a history of collisions that have been reported in the vicinity of the s-curve on Clarke Road north of Fanshawe Park Road as this site has been the focus of our continued surveys to explore "incidents" of vehicle loss-of-control that may not necessarily be reported to police. So we shifted the map and focused in closer to that site as shown in the photo below.



Closer view of RAIDS ONLINE map showing "traffic incidents" in the vicinity of Clarke Road north of Fanshawe Park Road.

As indicated in the above map there were no traffic incidents noted on Clarke Road north of Fanshawe Park Road and south of Sunningdale Road, which is where the s-curve of interest is located. The nearest reported incident appeared to be several kilometres to the south, at the intersection of Clarke Road and Killaly Road. So we clicked on that icon and received the "details" of that incident shown below.



View of the "details" of the traffic incident reported to be at the intersection of Fanshawe Park Road and Killaly Road in north-east London.

When we examine the details we note there is an "IR Number" at the top. This may possibly be a reference number used by the London City Police to locate this specific incident. But there is no explanation anywhere to indicate that this is so.

Next, we see a description of the "Crime" which is really a description of the traffic incident and this states "MVA OVER $1000 (NO INJURIES)". Well, this would be a description of a collision historically referred to as a "Property Damage Only" collision.

Next, we see a title "Location Type:" and below that we have a date "12-31-2013" which we believe must indicate the date when the collision occurred. We then see "Time" and the "11:10 PM", and we would interpret that this particular collision occurred at about 2310 hours or in night-time conditions. So far so good.

We then see some curious and unexplained notations: "Public Address" which indicates "CLARKE RD & KILALLY RD". Fine, we are satisfied up to this point that the data is referring to a collision that occurred at the intersection of Clarke Road and Killaly Road.

Then we see an unexplained title "Accuracy" which indicates "Address". And we ask: What does "Address" mean? No explanation.

We then see the title "Distance" and the notation "1.17 miles". Again, no explanation. "1.17 miles" from where? And why? While we have some suspicions, we know that the average reader of this data will have no clue what this means, so why include it if you do not intend to explain why it is there?

We then see the title "Agency" and the description "London Police Service". Presumably we are looking at data from the London Police Service so why do we need it confirmed at this juncture? Is it possible that collision information could be located on this map from another police agency or other source entirely? We do not know because there is no explanation.

The final point really sends the review into confusion. There is a little phrase "**This point has been randomly offset at the request of the agency to protect victim privacy". They did what? They moved the location of the accident so no one will know where the collision occurred? Is that what has been done? It certainly looks like it.

So now we have to evaluate what has been done. A considerable amount of effort has been made to show the public that collisions are occurring in London. Why? What reason could there be? Maybe the thought was that by knowing that collisions have occurred this might reduce the number of those collisions? But as a member of the public what good would it be for me to know that a collision occurred when the website will not tell me where it occurred?

If I am living on Road X and I am concerned about the safety of Road X I might want to go to this data and look at the history of collisions on Road X. But if the collision location on the map has been "randomly offset", or moved to some other location, how am I going to obtain any useful information about my concern?

We read that the reason why the collision location was randomly moved was "to protect victim privacy". What? How? Why? Is not the time, date and location of a collision already something that is reported in all news media in the area? Not only that, but the news media report the names of the individuals who were involved, where they are from, their ages and eventually details about their families (if the collision is significant enough). We do not see the necessity of reporting such details in this mapping but surely the precise location of a collision should not be of strategic importance to the defence of this nation.

From the viewpoint of independent safety researchers as ourselves, we see the political propaganda about "open data" and "working as servants to the public" and then we see the true actions behind those hollow words. How, over the years, even very basic information about where collisions occur is held in some secret vault for only the eyes and ears of secret agent 007. We could accomplish much more in our work had we had even the minimal cooperation of the City of London and its police service.

Certainly, over the last few years, Gorski Consulting has taken an active role, via this website, in conducting an open discussion about major collisions in South-Western Ontario and sometimes providing the public with minute details about the meaning of specific evidence. We do not believe that propaganda and fear mongering are long-lasting ways of preventing collisions from occurring. It is only through education and understanding that we can capture the public's interest. When we become better experts of what causes collisions, how they are caused and how we can be protected we have an opportunity to truly influence the public's driving behaviour. However, when you plant and nurture mushrooms you cannot be surprised at harvest time when you get nothing but mushrooms.

While we remain optimistic the RAIDS ONLINE website might finally become useful to independent safety researchers we have to remain sceptical.

London Ontario Survives First Portion of Winter Storm - But Extreme Wind Chills Await

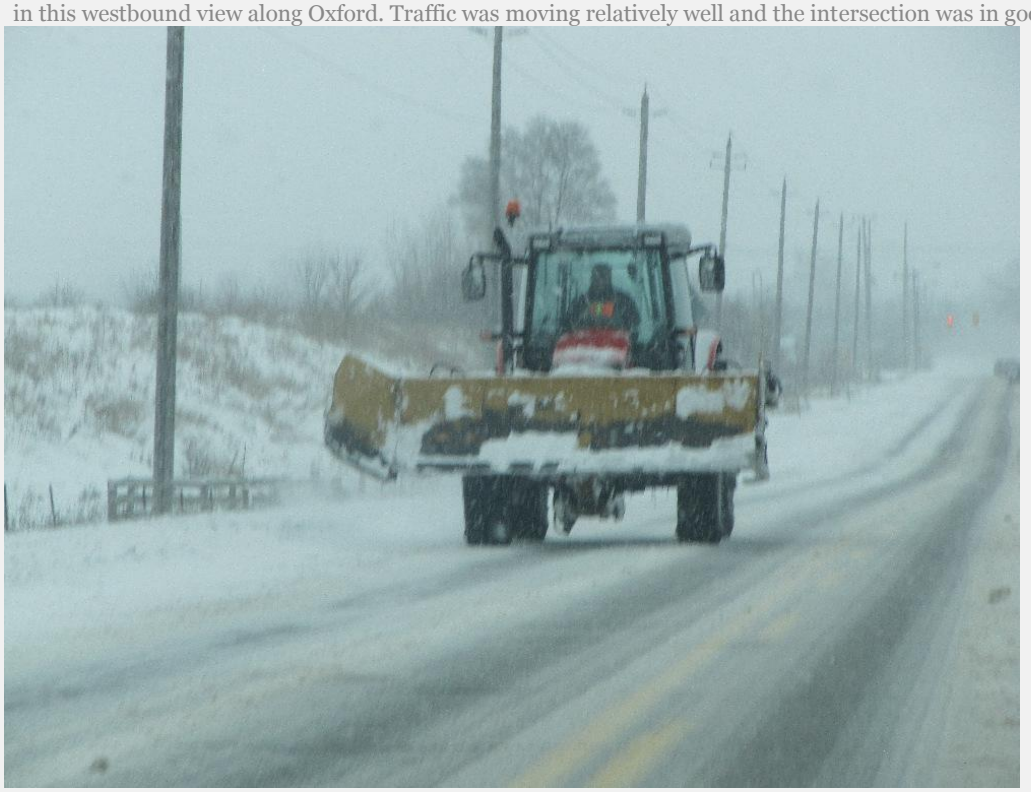
While areas along the eastern shores of Lake Huron have been hit by heavy snows and strong winds, for the most part, London, Ontario has survived quite well through to the morning of January 6th, 2014. Snowfall was significant but not overwhelming and City Works crews and their contractors worked overnight to clear the major roadways as indicated in some of the photos below, taken from the morning of January 6th.

View, looking north along Hale Street in east London on the morning of January 6th. Some drivers still felt compelled to transport large quantities of snow on the roof of their cars to other parts of the City or beyond. Not only is this a threat by potentially blinding a driver if the snow should shift onto the windows, but the snow also has the potential of unexpectedly being blown onto the windshields of passing vehicles potentially resulting in startled reactions by nervous drivers.

View of road surface conditions on the westbound curb lane of Dundas Street just east of Highbury. Although some snow remained in the lanes, snow plowing operations were exceedingly successful in coping with the challenge as almost all major roads in the City of London were plowed before morning traffic began to increase.

Garbage collection operations and snow plows do not mix well as snow plows tend to destroy many of the carefully piled garbage containers on the roadside before the garbage collection crews can get to them. Here a recycling truck is westbound on Oxford Street east of Adelaide trying to pick-up whatever pieces of recyclables remain after an earlier passage of a snow plow.

The busy intersection of Richmond Street and Oxford Street in London, Ontario, was in fine condition as shown in this westbound view along Oxford. Traffic was moving relatively well and the intersection was in good shape.



Wider plowing buckets such as this of a tractor travelling westbound on Fanshawe Park Road East, present a challenge in winter conditions as drivers can misjudge the extended width of the bucket while the vehicle itself is much narrower.

Emergency repairs can force work crews such as this one on Fanshawe Park Road East to block a lane and this can present a problem as vehicles must move into a lane of opposing traffic. Under snow-covered road conditions the passing of such work vehicles becomes a potential problem.

Further snow squalls are expected throughout the day of January 6th, however the greatest problem is likely to occur being this afternoon as temperatures fall, winds rise and wind chills expect to reach in the neighbourhood of -30 to -40 Celsius overnight. In such conditions it becomes vitally important that drivers and their passengers do not become stranded in a disabled vehicle as this could quickly become life-threatening.

January 5, 2014

Storm Slightly Late To Arrive In London Ontario, But Extremely Low Temperatures Could Be Dangerous

Road conditions in the late morning of January 5th, 2014 we still reasonable in London as shown in this photo looking north along the northbound curb lane of Clarke Road in east London.

While the forecast snow storm and tremendous drop in temperatures are sure to come, as of the late morning of Sunday, January 5th, the roads were generally wet with some slushy sections. The actual heavier snowfall did not start in London until just before 1700 hours.

Not much plowing has been going on because there has been nothing to plow. However road maintenance vehicles were out laying salt at a number of roads.

Salt pellets were thrown down on a number of roads on the morning of January 5th, such as noted in this photo at the intersection of Crumlin Side Road and Page Street in east London.

Salt, when freshly laid, can be seen as a concentrated grouping of crystals, particularly in intersections where more salt is generally laid than in other areas.

View of concentrated area of salt pellets that has just been freshly laid down by a passing snow plow.

By approximately 1630 hours some roads were starting to show signs of snow accumulation, but the wheel track areas of the lanes were still essentially wet.

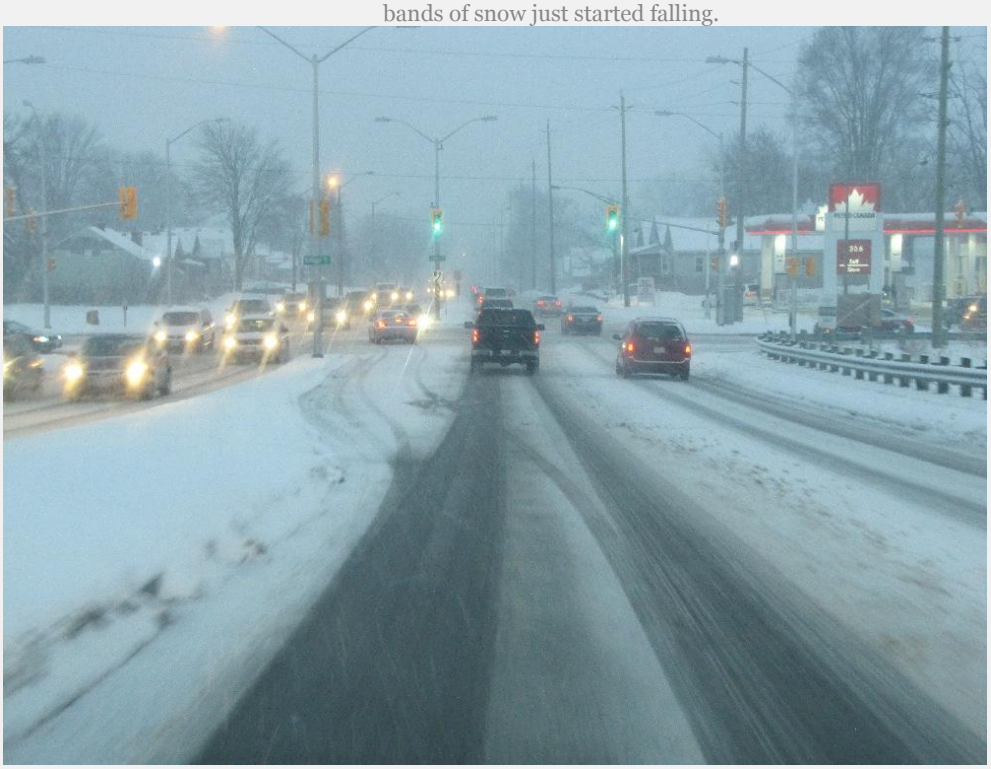
View, looking west, along Commissioners Road, west of Wharncliffe Road, at approximately 1630 hours, showing how the falling snow was starting to accumulate on the surface.

At approximately 1645 hours the downtown of London started experiencing a heavier band of snowfall.

View, looking east along Riverside Drive just east of Wharncliffe Road, just before a heavier band of snowfall began to fall over central London.

Shortly before 1700 hours east London was experiencing the heavier bands of snow.

View, looking east along Dundas Street near the Kellogg's cereal plant, just before 1700 hours as the heavier bands of snow just started falling.



View, looking south on Highbury Avenue just north of Trafalgar Road, just before 1700 hours as the heavier band of snow began to fall in east London.

It will be interesting to see how Londoners cope with this latest storm as this season has returned their memories to the more severe winters of the 1970s and prior. It is forecast that there will be a rapid decrease in temperatures overnight with possible flash freezing that could result in icy road conditions in the area. Given the later arrival of the storm it would be wiser for all official entities to close facilities such as schools, the university, etc. so that persons are not caught in the extreme wind chills that are forecast to reach between -30 and -40 Celsius. In those conditions anyone having the misfortune of having their vehicle stalled or incapacitated on the road would be in great danger. It would be wise, unless absolutely necessary for emergency purposes only, to simply stay indoors for the next 48 hours until the forecast extreme conditions subside.

January 4, 2014

Approach of Another Winter Storm Will Test Drivers and Road Maintenance Personnel

The forecast of the approach of another winter storm into southern Ontario, commencing over-night of January 4th to 5th, should test the skills of both drivers and road maintenance personnel.

It has been a more wintery winter this season compared to recent years as cold and snow arrived in November and have stayed like an unwelcome guest. Yesterday, January 3rd saw some of the coldest temperatures in a long time as the thermometer dropped to about -21 Celsius in the morning, in London, Ontario and then did not rise beyond -12 through the day. Such cold temperatures meant that everything stayed frozen.

It is notable that, in some instances, the lack of plowing, salting and sanding can lead to favourable road conditions. Local roads in London, Ontario that were not salted or sanded were left behind with a consistent layer of packed snow. One might not appreciate the benefit of this result. Unless there is a potential of icing, the existence of a consistent and packed layer of snow can be safe because drivers expectations are not violated. It is when conditions change, from one road to the next, and they become difficult to predict that drivers have difficulty adjusting to those changing conditions and that is when safety becomes a problem.

Cold temperatures and a lack of melting caused many local roads in London to take on a compacted layer of snow that provided a consistent and predictable level of deceleration.

Although this packed layer of snow provides an overall lower co-efficient of friction (i.e. the surface is more slippery) than a bare surface, it is a continuous sheet of surface that is consistent thus drivers can adjust their speed to those conditions and their expectations are not violated.

That is why it is extremely important, in maintenance operations, to be aware that the intervention into the natural and consistent environment can be worse than doing nothing at all when that intervention leads to an inconsistent road condition that is difficult for drivers to predict. Thus the application of salt or sand in an inconsistent manner that leaves certain portions of a road with too much salt or sand and others with not enough can lead to differences in the "slipperiness" of the surface and this can be misjudged by drivers. Typical scenarios where this might occur is where plowing, salting or sanding operations might be interrupted for various reasons and then commenced again a short distance later. The importance of such changes in application is never discussed or made known to the general public. Thus drivers who do not appreciate the practical difficulties of these maintenance operations can be blind to the dangers that exist. While cute phrases such as "When there is snow, go slow" appear to helpful, in fact they are nothing more than meaningless, cute sayings as they fail to provide drivers with the specific knowledge they need to cure their "blindness".

This photo demonstrates how plowing, sanding and salting can make a great difference in road conditions even in the unusually cold conditions of January 3rd, 2014. This photo was taken on the same day as the other photos above and shows that, when the resources are available, road conditions can become excellent.

Drivers need to be educated regarding what actions are performed by maintenance personnel, why and when. They need to be able to look at a road segment ahead of them and be able to better predict what the conditions are and if they are likely to change from where they are located. This becomes more difficult to do as a vehicle travels faster

and the distance ahead is covered in a shorter time while the driver's ability to detect the conditions ahead is not improved. The suspensions of modern vehicles are such that the driver's ability to detect changes in the road surface from the feedback obtained when a vehicle reacts to bumps or depressions is diminished.

Even differences in the noise made by the tires as they travel onto difference road surfaces and conditions could help a driver to detect potential problems. However when the in-cab audio is filled with conversations, a radio playing, or other distractions such help is lost.

We remain baffled by the fact that, such an important function as travelling safely in winter road conditions, is so little understood or taught. Few drivers understand that in winter conditions the greatest threat to one's safety is entering a state of loss-of-control of the vehicle and that the probability of this occurring without the willful neglect of the driver is highly increased in winter. Being able to predict the potential change of road conditions ahead becomes vitally important in winter. Understanding how and when maintenance operations can change road conditions is vital. Understanding how and when environmental factors such as wind can affect stability is vital. Understanding that the road geometry and roadside obstacles such as trees, houses and embankments have important effects on road conditions are also vital.

With the approach of another storm, the greatest dangers may not exist during the height of the environmental conditions that are expected through Sunday January 5th. Often it is after the height of that storm passes that the true problems commence. As vehicles begin to compact certain portions of a snow-covered lane differences develop in the "slipperiness" of the lane. A small misjudgment can take a vehicle from one type of surface into another without much warning. Yet drivers fail to appreciate this importance. As some maintenance activities commence we see further changes in the conditions of one road to the next and this will be accompanied by snow squalls that are forecast for Monday, January 6th. These squalls further heighten the differences between road conditions and make predictions by drivers even more prone to error.

Vigilance to the possibility of one's expectations being violated is truly the most important aspect of winter driving.

January 2, 2014

Another "Major Strasser Has Been Shot" Episode Rolls in like Mississauga Fog

In the famous movie "Casablanca" one cannot forget the classic scene after Rick shoots the Nazi Major Strasser in front of the Vichy-French police Captain Renault. Police reinforcements arrive and it is apparent that Captain Renault will ask his subordinates to arrest Rick. Instead Renault instructs his men: " Major Strasser has been shot, round

up the usual suspects". While this comes from a fairy tale, it is remarkable with respect to its truth.

On a regular basis police distract the public away from the causes of fatalities whenever they involve a fault in the roadway system. Much like Captain Renault, police do not divulge the obvious cause, like Rick, but instead lead the public into a misty fog, much like existed in the vicinity when Captain Renault uttered his famous words.

This is the case in the most recent fatality of today on Highway 410 near Highway 401 in Mississauga where a red Cadillac had obviously impacted a large, unprotected bridge stanchion resulting in the death of the unidentified driver. The obvious fact is that such a situation should not occur on perhaps one of the busiest sections of the busiest highways in North America. Unprotected bridge stanchions should not exist on such a highway, period. They might be excused on some hill-billy road in the backwoods that sees one vehicle each Friday of the month, but this is suburban Toronto, with a population of six million and expressways that should be designed to meet the highest demands. If ever there was a location where design should be at its peak then this should be it: Highway 410 and Highway 401.

When we read of this story and checked the various news feeds we came across an interview with a police officer who was standing at the scene describing to the reporter what had happened. In classic Captain Renault fashion this officer went about describing that a single vehicle had just struck the stanchion and his companions were looking for any witnesses. He even pointed to the unprotected stanchion only a few metres from his position as if it was a living room couch.

In fact the witness was standing right before the officer. It was an immovable witness that could not be hid. It was made of concrete. It was the stanchion itself. It revealed to everyone who knew anything about roadway design that there was a problem here. Why and how did this vehicle reach this unprotected stanchion? Where was the reporter who should have asked: Is this unprotected stanchion something that should exist here? Didn't they start making Fitch barrels back in the 1960's? Does no one know how to spell "impact attenuator"?

We are sorry for the driver of this vehicle, his family and his friends, for the lack of inquiry given to revealing the source of his death.

First Fatal Collision of the New Year Occurred On John Pound Road In Tillsonburg This Afternoon

Official news agencies are reporting that the first fatal collision in the region for this new year occurred on John Pound Road in Tillsonburg, Ontario. Reports indicate that around 1315 hours a car heading eastbound entered a state of loss-of-control and struck a westbound pick-up truck. The female driver of the car was killed. The collision reportedly occurred near the intersection with George Street.

Although no details have been provided, it is a dangerous situation when a vehicle rotates out-of-control because it often means that the side of that vehicle is struck by the front end of the other. There is far less protection provided to occupants struck in the side versus a vehicle that is struck in the front end. Given that the driver of the car was killed it is more likely that the vehicle was struck in the left side than the right, but the actual facts could be substantially different. Also, such loss-of-control collisions often occur on the curves of rural highways. Local conditions have not been ideal throughout today and it would not be surprising if snowfall on the roadway could also be a factor.

Having looked at the vicinity of the crash using Google Maps we can see several areas where such a potential collision could occur however the most likely one would be at the curve of John Pound Road just west of George Street. Further details may become available shortly and the specific location may become known.

UPDATE: January 3, 2014, 2110 Hours

The fatally injured driver of the eastbound car in this collision has now been identified as 70-year-old, Martine Boutin, of Langton, Ontario.

News media now report that the second occupant of the car, 80-year-old Raymond Boutin, has passed away. Police continue to search for witnesses to the crash.

The site location has now been adjusted slightly as being east of Borden Crescent, which is a little further to the west than the original crossroad of George Street. There is a substantial curve on John Pound Road just west of Borden Crescent and, in our opinion this could a primary candidate for the collision location. However, Google maps shows that the pavement along this road is new and the shoulders are paved. These characteristics do not match well with causing or contributing to a vehicle loss-of-control.

An important fact that has not been mentioned is the status of the road surface and whether snow/ice played a role in the loss-of-control. Yet, neither the news media nor the police will provide any indication of those road conditions. As we have stated on numerous occasions before, this is typical of the actions of both the media and police.

A common argument by police has been that they do not wish to provide a conclusion about the cause of a collision until they have completed their investigation. However, the revelation of whether or not the road surface was snow-covered or icy is not a conclusion, it is simply a statement of fact that is no different than stating, for example, that "Vehicle A came to rest in the eastbound lane". Similarly, police do not hesitate to inform the news media that "alcohol was involved" or "speed was involved" even when their investigation is not completed. Yet they are unexplainably silent when "road conditions were involved".

UPDATE: January 4, 2014; 1430 Hours

Well, the site of this fatal collision has been changed again. The London Free Press has submitted an additional article updated as of January 4th, 1321 hours, where they continue to report that the collision site was located "...on John Pound Road **east** of Borden Crescent...". However they finally submitted a photo showing the two involved vehicles and the characteristics of the site in the background clearly indicate that this site is at least 500 metres **WEST** of that intersection, not east. It is another indication that you should no longer believe what the mass media tells you.

Furthermore, we now have an indication of the road surface conditions. The site photo attached (see below) with the news article had to be taken while the vehicles were still at the site and it is unlikely that the visible snowfall occurred only after the collision took place and before the photo was taken. We can see that the road surface is snow-covered.

On-site photo taken by Chris Abbott of Tillsonburg News showing the involved vehicles at their final rest positions.

We also know that the roadway travelling eastbound is a significant downgrade. Put these facts together and the road conditions would obviously be an issue in this case. So we ask, why did no one reveal this for the last several days? Why did police not indicate that these facts existed? They had exclusive access to the site and, by closing the road, they prevented any independent agency from observing what the conditions were like shortly after the crash. Did they do anything to properly document the condition of the road so future investigators could consider what factors led to the crash? We always see that they conduct braking tests on roadways of fatal collisions, even when the drag factor is not an issue. So did they conduct a similar braking test on this road to demonstrate how slippery it was? Because if the road was not properly maintained that would become an issue of civil liability and the jurisdiction responsible for maintaining

the road could be sued. Is that jurisdiction the same one that is paying the salaries of the police in this local area? This has to be an issue of concern to the general public.

Worsening Road Conditions on Second Day of New Year Require Common Sense Reactions By Drivers

Snow began accumulating in the City of London commencing on the evening of Year's Day and has slowly continued into the second day of the new year.

View, looking north, along the northbound lanes of Clarke Road, south of Oxford on the morning of January 2, 2014. Snow cover has been variable and therefore difficult to predict.

Snow had not been plowed yet in most streets in London as of the morning of January 2nd so there were variable conditions that needed close attention. While drivers could expect reasonable traction and control of their vehicles while travelling in the relatively bare portions of the road where the tires of other vehicles have cleared a path, there were dangerous conditions lying just a few inches away from those cleared paths where accumulated snow awaited any wayward tires.

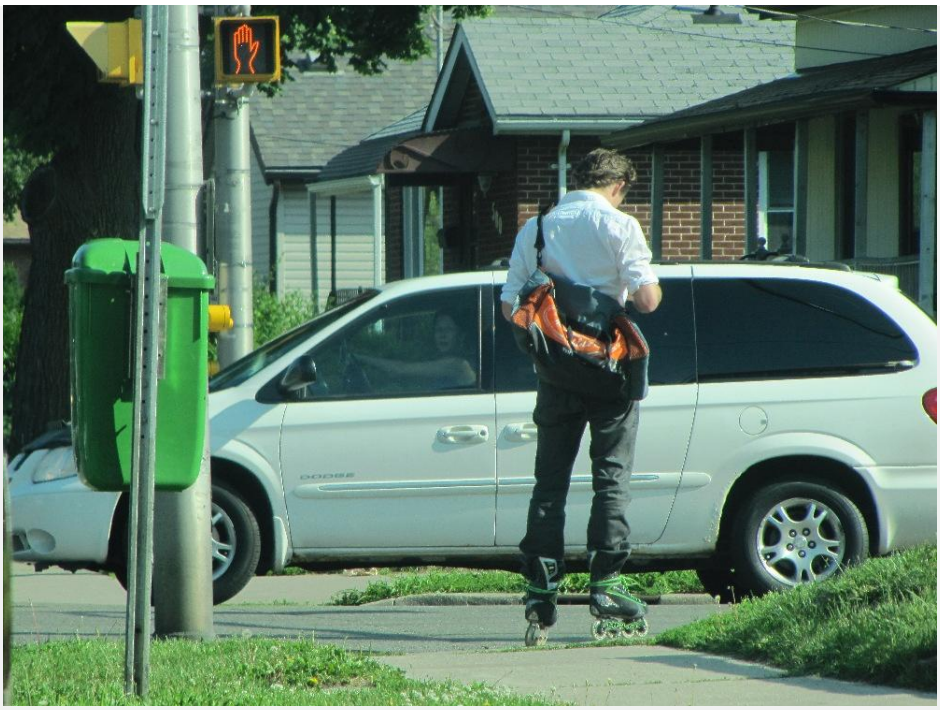
One of the least discussed problems that drivers encounter is when their vehicle strays outside of the bounds of the bare pavement and their right or left side tires encounter the snow that still remains within the lane. When the tires on one side of the vehicle enter this snow this causes a deceleration on that side of the vehicle which is essentially

a force applied away from the vehicle's centre-of-gravity. This "moment" can be dangerous if it overcomes the lateral tire force that keeps of the vehicle from rotating. Driver's accentuate the problem by applying sudden steering or braking when feeling their vehicle's slight lateral motion. Drivers inexperienced with maintaining control in such conditions frequently increase the problem with such steering and braking resulting in a progressively greater likelihood of loss-of-control. There is a reason why driving instructors recommend doing nothing, or very little, in such situations to allow the tire force to remain relatively equal. It is rare that a single incident of striking a bit of snow in a travel lane will cause a complete loss-of-control of a vehicle. It is far more common that the reactions of drivers to such situations contribute to that loss-of-control.

January 1, 2014

Reading Between The Lines Of Results From Study On Distracted Driving

The Toronto Star reported on the findings of a "special report" published today in the New England Journal of Medicine, on the dangers of distracted driving. The study followed the driving actions of 42 novice drivers and 109 experienced drivers over a period of 12 to 18 months. In that study period the total number of drivers (novice and experienced) were involved in 73 crashes (31 by novices, 42 by experienced) and 612 "near crashes" which were defined as "any circumstance requiring a last-moment physical manoeuvre that challenged the physical limitations of the vehicle to avoid a crash for which the driver was at fault or partially at fault".



Here, a driver is distracted by seeing a distracted pedestrian, or at least a pedestrian on roller blades. It's a new world out there!

The Toronto Star article noted the following highlights of the study results:

"Compared to periods when they weren't distracted, the odds of a novice driver getting into a crash or near-crash were 8.32 times higher when they were dialing a cell phone. They were eight times higher when reaching for something besides their cell phone, 7.05 times higher when trying to grab the phone, 3.9 times higher when looking at something on the side of the road (including cars involved in other crashes), and 2.99 times higher when eating.

For the experienced drivers, the only activity that increased the risk of a crash or near-crash risk was dialing a cell phone. That made drivers 2.49 times more likely to get into trouble behind the wheel, according to the study results."

Not surprisingly, one can take this information in many ways. For example these drivers, whether novice or experienced appeared to be involved in an unusually large number of crashes in the short time of their study and it does not indicate that those crashes were the result of distracted driving. The total number of drivers in the study was 151 yet they were involved in 73 in the period of 12 to 18 months. That would mean that about one out of every two drivers in the study group was involved in a crash in that study period. Was it the "GPS systems, radar, four cameras, accelerometers and other equipment" that were installed in the vehicles that influenced this large number of crashes?

The words could also be twisted to say something else: No activity of distraction of the experienced drivers resulted in an increased danger of a crash. So reaching for something, such as a cell phone, in the car did not increase the danger of a crash, looking at crashed vehicles on the side of the road did not increase that danger and neither did eating. Is that also a reasonable interpretation of the findings? While we agree that the study's conclusions are generally correct, it demonstrates the need to take what we are fed with some degree of caution and evaluation.

Gorski Consulting
London, Ontario, Canada