



NEWS RELEASE

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Alberta companies adopt policies restricting employees' use of cellphones while driving

U of A students expand Pan-Alberta Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving to encourage people and companies to limit use of cellphones in vehicles

EDMONTON – On the first anniversary of the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving's launch, the group announced a new expansion. The Coalition, previously a capital-region initiative, launched a province-wide campaign today during a whirlwind nine-stop tour of Alberta.

The project, created and led by graduate students in the University of Alberta's School of Public Health, convinced several prominent Alberta companies to adopt policies that restrict their employees' use of cellphones while driving.

To date, six corporate sponsors officially signed on with a commitment to cellphone-free driving. Members include Halliburton, Tucker Wireline Services Canada, Sterling Crane, Shippers Supply Inc., Schlumberger and Hole's Greenhouses and Gardens Ltd.

"Our company has made a corporate commitment to employee safety by not permitting them to use a cellphone, 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. "We are proud to be partners in this coalition."

"The safety of our employees is very important," says Russ Brown, Sterling Crane's Director of Safety and Environmental Affairs. "Whether an injury occurs on or off the job, it has an impact on our business which extends well beyond economics and touches us very personally. We are confident that our cellphone policy will make a difference."

This year, the Coalition has expanded its program to increase public awareness about the dangers of driving while using a cellphone through a new partnership with some of Alberta's regional health authorities. Sterling Crane provided an aircraft to shuttle the team of students and supporters between nine locations today to host kick-off events around the province.

"I am very proud of the great job our students and regional supporters did on this project," says Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, Professor in the School of Public Health. "And to have the opportunity to celebrate our provincial expansion and meet our partners in person across Alberta is tremendous."

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.

"As an emergency physician in Edmonton, I have seen the catastrophic results of cellphone use by drivers again this month. But the car crash victims that I see in hospital are the lucky ones, because they still have a chance to survive. Those who die in these collisions never make it to me, and I don't ever see the devastating impact on their families," says Dr. Darren Nichols, Director of the CFPC Emergency Medicine Program at the University of Alberta. "Just as there is no excuse for drunk driving, there is no excuse for this. Children, teenagers, adults are all at risk when cellphone using drivers are behind the wheel."

Several years ago, the Canadian Medical Association urged government to pass legislation banning cellphone 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 cellphone users are four times more likely to be in a collision than non-users. Some 36 jurisdictions have passed legislation governing cellphone use in vehicles.

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.

"Traffic injuries are a critical public health issue in this province," says Robert Campbell, President of the Alberta Public Health Association. "We hope that these corporate policies will help educate employees and encourage cellphone-free driving both on and off the job."

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Transport Canada: cellphones and driving, questions and answers:

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

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador news release on cellphone use:

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