



NEWS RELEASE

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Majority of Albertans support ban on cellphone use while driving

Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving releases survey results and welcomes new member

FORT MCMURRAY – Results of a recent provincial survey show that most Albertans recognize the dangers of cellphone use while driving and support legislation that would make it illegal. The Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving released the survey results today at an event in Fort McMurray that celebrated Northern Lights Health Region joining the group.

Seventy-three percent of those surveyed rated cellphone use while driving as very or somewhat dangerous. Seventy-four percent supported legislation that would make it illegal to use a cellphone while driving. The survey was conducted independently by the Population Research Laboratory at the University of Alberta.

“The survey results speak for themselves,” says Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, founder of the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving. “Albertans understand that driving and talking on cellphones is dangerous and they are ready for policies that make driving safer for everyone.”

“Overall, we are thrilled that Albertans support the messages we are giving, but we have some concerns about a lack of knowledge,” continues Francescutti. “For instance, it appears that some Albertans don’t realize that whether you use a cellphone hand-held or hands-free, the dangers are the same. It’s the conversation that is distracting.”

The results of the survey were released publicly at an event to honour Northern Lights Health Region for joining the Coalition. The health authority recently put a policy in place that bans the use of cellphones while driving on work time.

“The Northern Lights Health Region is proud to become a member of the Coalition for Cellphone-free driving,” said Bernie Blais, CEO of the Northern Lights Health Region. “The health and safety of our employees are priorities in our health region. Joining the Coalition and having a cellphone-free driving policy helps keep our employees safe while driving.”

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To date, fifteen organizations have officially signed on with a commitment to cellphone-free driving. Members include Sterling Crane, Halliburton, Tucker Wireline Services Canada, Shippers Supply Inc., Schlumberger, Hole's Greenhouses and Gardens Ltd., Finning (Canada)/Finning Cat, McElhanney Land Surveys Ltd., Husky Energy, CEDA, Calgary Health Region, Edmonton Bicycle and Touring Club, Aspen Regional Health Authority, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the Northern Lights Health Region.

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.

Several years ago, the Canadian Medical Association urged government to pass legislation banning cellphone use while driving. 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. Approximately 40 countries around the world have implemented cellphone restrictions to date.

The policy recommended by the Coalition 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.

The Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving is a group of companies and organizations who are committed to reducing cellphone use while driving. The Coalition was formed in 2005 by a group of graduate students at the University of Alberta and is supported by the Alberta Public Health Association and the University of Alberta, School of Public Health.

For more information contact:

Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti
Founder- Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving
Professor, School of Public Health, University of Alberta
780-492-5775 or 780-932-7187

Cate Burant-Fernuik
Project Coordinator/Communications
Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving
780-492-5775 or 780-975-4483

To make arrangements for interviews in Edmonton call Liza Sunley at 418- 7141

Carmen Leibel
Public Affairs Associate, Media
780-492-0436
carmen.leibel@ualberta.ca

Visit www.cellphonefreedriving.ca

Coalition
Cellphone-Free Driving

Office of Public Affairs
6th Floor General Services Building
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada · T6G 2H1
Tel: 780.492.2325 · Fax: 780.492.2997
public.affairs@ualberta.ca