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HERE KITTY, KITTY

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FUNDING FACEOFF

Readers sound off on Ted Brown's views on arena funding
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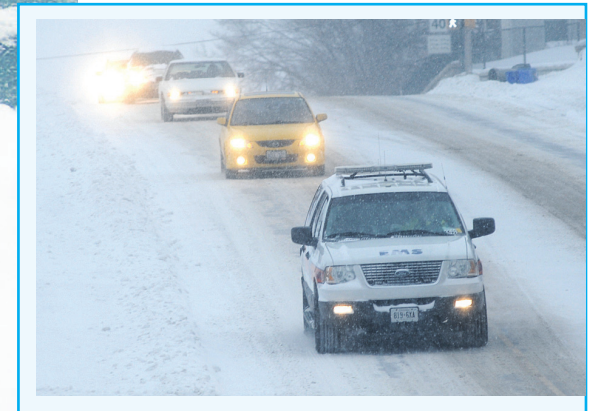
Halton Hills' award-winning newspaper



Winter storm is snow fun for drivers

Like thousands of southern Ontario residents, John De Vries of Edward Street was up early Tuesday cleaning snow off his vehicle. (Inset) Traffic on Maple Avenue in Georgetown inched along as blowing snow caused visibility problems.

Photos by Ted Brown



Erroneous 9-1-1 calls putting lives at risk: Police

By **JEREMY GRIMALDI**
Metroland Media Group

Halton Police have been inundated by nearly 11,000 false 9-1-1 calls over the past four months.

About 4,000 of those originate from the increasingly ubiquitous pocket dials, which police say are putting lives in jeopardy and becoming a major headache for operators.

Staff Sgt. Kevin Maher, communications manager for the force, said in an emergency every second counts, meaning operators don't have time to track down people who sit on their phones and accidentally call police.

"After a call we will keep investigating until we are

satisfied that it's not an emergency," he said. "That can take two seconds, but other times our operators go to great lengths to make sure that there is no emergency."

He said for every erroneous call that's looked into, acting on another one could be delayed by vital seconds.

Maher estimated out of the 10,984 false calls into 9-1-1, a third were due to pocket dials (inadvertently dialing while putting the phone in a pocket or purse), a third was attributed to children playing with parents' cell phones and another third were from people who misdialled or intended to dial 311 or 411 for information.

However, the greatest current concern is for the pocket dials.

"The problem is getting worse not better," he said. "I would say about five calls an hour are attributed to

pocket dials.

"That number is growing and I would say it will eventually become our biggest."

Some of his suggestions to avoid making erroneous emergency calls include taking SIM cards out of phones before giving them to children or not allowing children to make phone calls and removing 9-1-1 from the speed dial.

Maher said people also need to better familiarize themselves with the use of the line for emergency calls only.

He cited "surprising" instances where someone called 9-1-1 to ask if he was able to park on a certain street and another called to ask if the roads were safe for him to travel on during a recent snowfall.

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