

'Pocket' calls a pain for police

By **TIM WHITNELL**
Metroland Media Group

One out of every seven 911 call to Halton Regional Police during a portion of last year was an inadvertent communication caused by so-called 'pocket dialing'.

Halton Police report that for the six-month period from May 1-Nov. 1, 2011, they received 68,175 emergency calls—9,698 were considered inadvertent 'pocket dials', a rate of 14.2 per cent.

A pocket dial occurs when a cellphone stored in an unsecured manner, in places such as pockets, handbags and backpacks, accidentally places calls while being tossed about.

"Just one (wrong 911) call can tie up our (dispatch/policing) resources," said Halton Police media relations officer Sgt. Dave Cross.

He doesn't know how police would quantify the cost in time and money as the circumstances of each 911 call is unique, he said.

It saves police time and money though, he said, if someone who accidentally calls 911 via a pocket dial stays on the line with police to verify the mistake.

"It's simpler if they stay on the line. It alleviates the necessity to call someone back," said Cross, noting people are not fined for making the accidental calls.

The nearly 9,700 pocket dials to Halton

police in just half of 2011 is a separate issue from 911 calls that were purposely made to police but aren't considered emergency calls by them, said Cross.

Halton Police doesn't have those figures but Cross guessed it would be a significant number as well.

Among the non-emergency 911 calls that police receive from the public, said Cross, are for things like thefts or any crime that has happened, but is not in progress.

Cross said some people actually use 911 to find out the time of day or to get directions to a destination.

Inappropriate 911 calls from youngsters are common too, he said, noting schools often will teach little ones how to make an emergency

phone call.

"We get a lot of children that will test the system," said Cross.

He recalled one such incident with his Kindergarten-aged daughter about five years ago. She dialed 911 and hung up; Cross answered a return call from the 911 dispatcher.

"She (daughter) denied it," he said of making the call, "but because of my interviewing skills I was able to crack her," he joked.

People can avoid pocket dialing by keeping the phone in a holster designed for it. If you don't have a holster, lock the device's keypad or put it in standby mode.



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Town eyeing 5.5 per cent tax hike

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tions—\$380,000), 1 per cent Special Infrastructure Levy (used to for capital needs—\$294,000), and 0.7 per cent Library Operating Levy (to help pay for the expanded operating costs at the new libraries—\$220,000).

Salaries and benefits make up 52 per cent of the budget, with an additional \$732,400 added this year as a result of economic adjustments, pay grid increases and job evaluation changes. The Town has 228 full-time employees, two contract, 111.6 part-time, 1.9 capital full-time and 0.6 capital contract.

Staff has also included \$208,000 of additional costs such as 9.3 new staff, training, and agreement expenses.

Town tax increases in the past five years have been:

- 5.4 per cent in 2007 (with 3.7 per cent assessment growth),
- 9.6% in 2008 (2.1% assessment growth)
- 6% in 2009 (1.7% assessment growth)
- 4.9% in 2010 (0.8% assessment growth)
- 5.9% in 2011 (1% assessment growth).

The assessment growth in 2012 will be lower than expected at 0.8 per cent.



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