

EDITORIAL

with Frances Learment

Here's hoping

At press time, Halton police had not released any results from the holiday R.I.D.E (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) program, so there is no way yet to know if drivers are finally getting the message.

Impaired driving is Canada's number one criminal cause of death, and every day, four Canadians are killed and 200 are injured in alcohol-related crashes.

Last holiday season, eight drivers in District One – Acton, Georgetown and Milton – were charged with impaired driving at R.I.D.E stops. Region-wide, Halton police stopped 17,396 vehicles, administered 564 roadside breath tests and laid 37 impaired driving charges.

Understandably, police were frustrated, noting that anti-drinking and driving legislation was introduced in Canada 90 years ago in 1921, yet many still have not got the message.

Let's hope this year's results are better with more stops and fewer charges.



Looking Back



Ten Years Ago

- A survey of local merchants found there may have been fewer shoppers in Acton over the holidays, but they spent more than in previous years.

- A joint funeral service was held for newlywed former Acton resident Lori Swackhammer and her husband, Troy Hunter, who were killed in a head-on crash on Christmas Day near Alliston.

Five Years Ago

- Emergency officials warn people that the ice on Fairy Lake is not thick enough to support people walking, skating or snowmobiling on it.

- Acton's Kasia Sitarz opened her new business – Body Movement Therapeutics – in X Marks the Fitness Spot in downtown Acton.

After 25 years, it's time to stop spinning our wheels

Science Matters

By David Suzuki



In 1988, hundreds of scientists and policy-makers met in Toronto for a major international conference on climate change. They were sufficiently alarmed by the accumulated evidence for human-caused global warming that they issued a release stating, "Humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war."

They urged world leaders to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2005. Had we heeded that warning and embarked on a campaign to meet the target, Canadians would now be healthier (because of reduced air pollution), have greater reserves of energy and more jobs.

In 1988, George H.W. Bush ran for the highest office in the U.S. and promised to be an "environmental president". He didn't have a green bone in his body, but public pressure compelled him to make a commitment he ultimately didn't keep. That year, Margaret Thatcher was filmed picking up litter. She turned to the camera and said, "I'm a greenie, too."

Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was also re-elected in 1988. He appointed a bright new political

star, Lucien Bouchard, as environment minister. I asked Bouchard during an interview what he considered to be our most important environmental issue. "Global warming," he responded. I continued: "How serious is it?" His answer: "It threatens the survival of our species. We have to act now."

In 1988, the environment was a top public concern, scientists spoke out and politicians said the right things. Global warming was a pressing and present issue. Now, 25 years later, carbon dioxide emissions continue to rise, and we're already seeing the consequences – more extreme weather events, melting glaciers and Arctic ice, rising sea levels, reduced water flows in rivers and climate-related illness and death, among others. It's driven in part by rapid economic growth in countries like China, India and Brazil. At the same time, most industrialized nations, whose use of fossil fuels created the problem of excess greenhouse gases, have done little to reduce emissions.

In 1992, more than 1,700 eminent scientists, including 104 Nobel prizewinners, signed the "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity", which included this urgent warning: "No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished."

The document concluded that environmentally damaging activity must be brought under control and the integrity of Earth's ecosystems protected, critical resources managed more effectively, human population growth stabilized, poverty reduced and eventually eliminated, and sexual equality and guarantees of women's reproductive rights ensured.

The sooner we act, the easier it will be to overcome these difficult challenges. Every year that we stall makes it more costly and challenging, with increasing negative impacts on humans and our environment. There are signs of hope. Many countries – as well as cities, states and provinces – are taking global warming seriously and are working to reduce emissions and shift to cleaner energy sources. Some world leaders are even questioning our current paradigm, where the economy is made a priority above all else.

This is crucial. Over and over, the economy has determined the extent of our response, but how much value does it place on breathable air, drinkable water, edible food and stable weather and climate? Surely the economy is the means to a better future, not an end in itself. Surely it must be subordinate to a rich, diverse ecosphere that sustains all life. Let's hope this year ushers in a new way of living on and caring for our planet.



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