

Halton Police on lookout for drinking and driving

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Statistics released this week by the Halton Regional Police indicate that arrests for impaired driving were down approximately 45 per cent during the holidays.

More than 15,000 vehicles were stopped by officers during the December RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) campaign with 31 arrests made for impaired driving, down from 56 arrests made last year.

But there's another pro-active method of getting impaired drivers off the road that most Halton residents probably haven't heard about.

Halton Police have started employing another tactic— not just during its recently completed Project Holiday 2.0 (second-annual) campaign— but year-round.

It's called Project One and was recently initiated by an officer at the HRPS Milton detachment, who introduced the idea of conducting random spot checks on patrons at around 1 p.m. daily to seek out those who may have had too much to drink at lunch time and then decided to drive.

The HRPS invited an *Independent & Free Press* reporter to ride along with Const. Brian Lowerison during his regular patrols and to demonstrate how Project One works.

It's Monday, Dec. 28 and it's a fairly quiet afternoon in downtown Milton, just a few minutes after one o'clock. The parking lot behind a well-known downtown pub is half-empty as Const.

Lowerison backs into an alleyway across the street in a non-descript greyish-coloured SUV called a "ghost car."

The stakeout is set.

Const. Lowerison has been with the Halton force for two years and estimates he's taken on about 20 ride-alongs, with most requesting to accompany him on a Friday or Saturday night.

"Actually, it seems like Sunday and Monday nights are usually the busiest for me," he said.

"It's pretty dead on weekends (in Milton) because people go to downtown Toronto or wherever. I worked a Monday before Christmas and had 15 calls on the one shift. Didn't even get a chance to do any traffic stuff"

As we wait for someone to emerge from the pub's doorway, Const. Lowerison mentions that the Highway Traffic Act in Ontario provides "a million reasons" for the justification of a driver to be pulled over in a spot check.

"If you see a guy walking out of his car stumbling from side to side, I'm going to get out and talk to him," the officer explains. "As soon as he touches his car with his keys in hand, that's it for him because you've got care and control and you don't want to let him get into the driver's seat."

After about a half an hour, two men come out of the pub and head for a red pickup truck in the parking lot. As the vehicle slowly pulls out into the roadway without signalling his turn, the cruiser follows closely behind with lights and sirens activated.

The driver doesn't stop on the street, but rather turns into a private

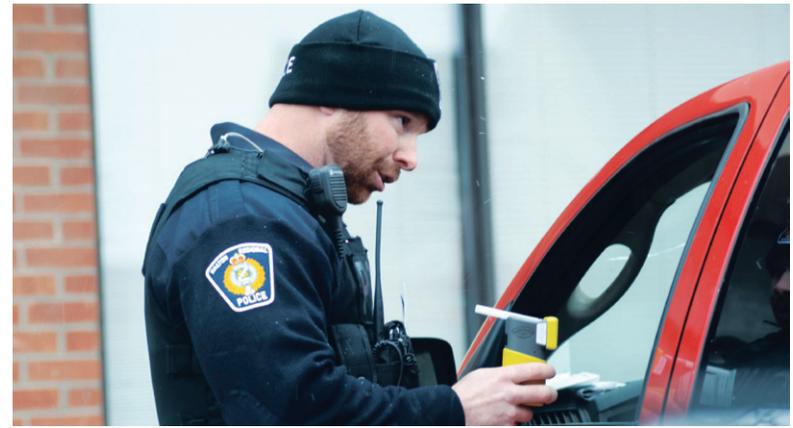
parking lot with several surrounding businesses. In the meantime, Const. Lowerison has typed the vehicle's licence plate into the on-board Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database to check for any previous offences, discovering that the 67-year-old registered owner from rural Acton received two warnings in 2014 within the span of a month for exceeding the 0.05 mg. warn limit. Another warning would result in a 30-day suspension.

It's interesting to note that although impaired driving arrests in Halton were down last month compared to 2014, there was a 65 per cent increase in the number of three-day suspensions issued over last year.

The officer gets out of the cruiser and politely explains that he's conducting spot checks for impaired drivers, asking the suspect how many beers he's had and how long ago did he take his last drink. The driver is then asked if he's willing to agree to take the roadside alcohol screening device (ASD) test.

Both men in the truck are smoking cigarettes, meaning that a 15-minute wait is required before administering a breathalyzer test so that the reading isn't skewed.

The man takes the breathalyzer test and as they



Const. Brian Lowerison administers a breathalyzer test to an Acton driver in Milton.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

await the results, Const. Lowerison asks if he'd had anything to eat while at the restaurant. Informed that the suspect had eaten a pound of 50-cent wings, the officer replies, "That's a great deal. I'll have to try them out. I can eat a lot more than one pound though," as the men laugh.

The ASD cursor stops spinning and churns out the breathalyzer reading,

0.042, which is merely 0.008 under the warning limit. No offence has been committed and the driver is allowed to leave, but not before receiving some advice from the officer.

"You're good to go, but be careful. You're pushing that limit with the two warnings already," he said.

"It was probably those breath mints that got you through it, right?"



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