

ARE YOU A DISTRACTED DRIVER? THE STAKES ARE EVEN HIGHER

The stakes will now be even higher when it comes to distracted driving in Ontario, as strengthened laws took effect on New Year's Day.

The changes include licence suspensions, increased demerit points and a higher minimum financial penalty that can be charged to those guilty of distracted driving.

We fully support the inflated fines and penalties now in place for distracted driving, which continues to be a challenge on Ontario's roads almost a decade after the initial legislation banning hand-held devices was passed.

Recent Canadian Auto Association research shows that one in three Ontario drivers admits to engaging in distracted driving as a result of using a mobile device.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, one person is injured in a distracted driving collision every 30 minutes.

This new legislation is the first increase since September 2015 when demerit points were added to distracted driving convictions. The increased fines and penalties are some of the strongest in the country, and we expect they will further aid law enforcement in their continued effort to make road conditions safer for everyone.

Ontario drivers can now expect the following fines and penalties if caught driving distracted:

. The minimum financial penalty has increased from \$490 to \$615;

. A first conviction for distracted driving now results in a three-day licence suspension, three demerit points and a minimum financial penalty of \$615;

. A second conviction will result in a financial penalty of up to \$2,000 (previously up to \$1,000), six demerit points and a seven-day licence suspension;

. For third (or more) convictions, drivers will face a financial penalty of up to \$3,000 (previously up to \$1,000), six demerit points and a 30-day licence suspension.

Hopefully these new rules will encourage Halton motorists to remain focused on the road and keep devices far from reach when operating their vehicles.

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WINTER HIKING: IT'S ALL ABOUT FOOTWEAR

IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE SWITCH TO WINTER HIKING BOOTS, SAYS NICOLA ROSS



NICOLA ROSS
Column

It's time to put on snow tires. Right? What if I told you it was also the time to switch to your winter hiking boots?

Winter hiking boots? What are winter hiking boots and why would I need them? You may wonder.

BOOTS

I spoke with Gerry Johnson, the hiking boot guy at Hiker's Haven on the QEW in Oakville. He said there are three main differences between summer and winter hiking boots:

1. Winter boots are insulated. They are rated from -20 to -40 C.

2. They are usually higher cut to keep snow out of your boots.

3. Most importantly, they have a sole made of rubber that, like snow tires, stays soft and pliable when cold.

This means that winter hiking boots keep your feet warm and dry, and give you great traction in snowy conditions and superior traction on ice.

ICERS

If the trails are icy, you can add icers, whether they are winter or summer boots. Slipping icers onto your boots is akin to putting chains on your snow tires.

They come in various degrees of "aggressiveness," with Yaktrax (\$34.99 and up) being about a four on a scale of one to 10.

Gerry likes ICETrekkers with a diamond pattern (\$54.99) because they are more aggressive than Yaktrax (about a six on the

scale) and don't slip sideways. One feature he likes is that you can leave them on for sections of the trail that are clear of snow or ice.

Kahtoola MICROspikes (\$77.99) are more aggressive yet (eight on the scale), but won't stand up to walking across hard roads or along clear sections of trails.

POLES

They aren't footwear, but using hiking poles is a great idea, especially if the trails are icy. If you do so, make sure the metal tips are exposed.

Happy winter hiking.

From Loops & Lattes Hiking Guides' author and avid hiker Nicola Ross. Visit nicolaross.ca to purchase one of her four hiking guides, sign up for her newsletter and receive info about hiking trails, books, contests and more. Reach her at nross@woodrising.com.

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