

Legalization of marijuana will keep police on alert for impaired drivers

No pot luck if caught driving while high

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Halton Regional Police is reminding motorists that impaired driving is impaired driving, whether your ability to operate a vehicle is compromised by alcohol or marijuana or some other drug.

Halton police says there has been "significant media attention" concerning the legalization and regulation of recreational marijuana in Canada with federal legislation (Bill C-45) possibly in place by the end

of this summer.

"Our community has expressed concerns about how this legislation will impact the incidence and enforcement of drug-impaired driving in Halton Region," said Halton police Sgt. Ryan Snow, head of Traffic Services.

"We know this is an issue. It's becoming more commonplace for motorist to mix drugs and alcohol, which leads to unpredictable consequences of impaired driving," he added.

"This is why we continue to train officers in specialized areas regarding drug recognition. We are in a position to accurately identify symptoms related to drug-impaired driving, even when in conjunction with alcohol."

Halton police notes im-

paired driving is impaired driving, whether the impairment is by alcohol or by a drug. The Criminal Code of Canada does not differentiate between alcohol-impaired driving offences and drug-impaired driving offences.

"Driving while impaired by any drug is a criminal offence, and has been since 1925. In fact, over time, the Criminal Code has evolved in such a manner as to enhance the ability of law enforcement to detect drug impairment," said Snow.

Impairment by alcohol or by drugs affects information-processing, hand-eye co-ordination, judgment, concentration, comprehension, visual acuity and reaction time, says Halton police.

"These effects are readi-



Metroland file photo

Driving while impaired by any drug is a criminal offence, police remind motorists.

ly recognizable and cannot be concealed by a motorist. If suspected impaired driving is witnessed, a traffic stop will be initiated by Halton police officers," said Snow.

If a driver is suspected of being impaired by a drug, specially-trained officers will conduct a roadside Standardized Field Sobri-

ety Test (SFST). The SFST is a physical co-ordination test used to determine if there are probable grounds to conduct further testing.

If there are probable grounds to conduct further testing, an additional 12-step evaluation will be conducted by an accredited Drug Recognition Expert (DRE).

If the DRE officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a suspect is impaired by drugs, they can demand a blood, urine or saliva sample. Based on the results of the DRE evaluation, criminal charges related to drug-impaired driving may be laid under the Criminal Code.

"The impending legalization of marijuana will not have an effect on how Halton police enforces drug-impaired driving. Our service will continue to use the SFST and the DRE evaluation to apply the Criminal Code," Snow said. Current penalties for drug-impaired driving range from a \$1,000 fine on a first offence to 120 days in prison on a third or subse-

● See IMPAIRED, page 21



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