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Drivers say ambulance 'terrible' in snow

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

Ambulance drivers plan to rehash concerns that a new emergency vehicle is inadequate for winter driving following Tuesday's crash at Quality Greens.

Workers submitted a report in December to the District of Halton & Mississauga Ambulance Service Ltd. expressing worries that the vehicle handles badly in the snow.

"The traction and braking of this vehicle are terrible," driver Mike Chorney of Milton wrote in an occurrence report to the company after the first major snowfall of the season.

"I do not know what the solution is, but I feel that whatever can be done, should be done, now — not after an accident or when the snow is gone."

The company's Milton station started using a new vehicle in the late fall after turning in its 1989 Dodge for a 1992 Ford.

The vehicle, driven by ambulance attendant Louis Gazzoli, 37, of Toronto, crashed through the front of Quality Greens on Main Street at 4:30 p.m. after he lost control in icy conditions.

Heart attack patient Harry Trowbridge, 78, of Steeles Avenue was in the back of the ambulance. Another emergency vehicle was called to the scene while an attendant, who was injured, performed CPR on Mr. Trowbridge. The patient was pronounced dead at Milton District Hospital.

"On snow, it just doesn't handle the way it should," said Mr. Gazzoli who has been an ambulance driver for 17 years. He filed a report Wednesday with the Ministry of Labour complaining about the vehicle.

Last year's report to the company, obtained by *The Champion*, suggests



Photo by JANE MULLER

Ambulance drivers are questioning a new emergency vehicle's suitability for winter driving following an accident at Quality Greens Tuesday afternoon.

the new vehicle is much lighter "due to the use of plastic cupboards instead of the three-quarter-inch plywood and arborite" in the old Dodge.

"With the incredible torque produced by the diesel engine, the rear wheels just spin when the slightest amount of pedal is applied."

"In all sincerity," the report continues, "I feel this vehicle is a hazard to drive in the winter. I have been doing this job for 10 years and I can honestly say that this is the

first time I have been seriously worried about the safety of myself, partner, and the public due to the performance of one of our vehicles."

Gord Armes, president of local 207 of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), said the union plans to readdress safety concerns with the company.

Regardless of the cause of Tuesday's accident — which just missed injuring employees inside the store — the vehicle needs upgrading for winter driving, he said.

"Do we have the best equipment?," questioned Mr. Armes. "We've always maintained we should have snow tires."

But Brent Thomas, district supervisor for the company, defended the vehicle saying it "meets federal and provincial safety standards."

He added that it's a matter of the ambulance drivers "getting used to a new style of vehicle."

The ambulance is equipped with efficient all-season radial tires, so snow tires would make no difference, Mr. Thomas said.

NEWSLINES

Serious injuries in 401 crash

A major accident on Hwy. 401 in Milton Tuesday morning seriously injured a 19-year-old Mississauga woman who was standing in front of her car on the shoulder of the road.

A Canadian Tire tractor-trailer struck the rear of a Chevette when it changed lanes on the westbound highway near the CNR overpass, the Milton OPP said.

The car hit a cement guard rail, while the tractor-trailer jack-knifed and smashed into a vehicle parked on the north shoulder.

The impact forced the vacant car forward hitting a motorist, who was standing in front of the vehicle. The victim was taken to Milton District Hospital with injuries described by police as "major."

A 28-year-old Mississauga man has been charged with failing to signal a turn.

INSIDE



Cheryl McClelland is Milton's "Tammy" for 1993.

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Halton police officer charged with obstructing justice

A veteran Halton police officer has been criminally charged in connection with an investigation surrounding an anonymous letter alleging police wrongdoing.

Sgt. Rod Wilson, who appeared yesterday morning for a Police Services Act hearing in connection with the same incident, now also faces a charge of attempting to obstruct justice.

A 20-year veteran of the Halton force, Sgt. Wilson, 45, isn't believed to be the author of the letter, but is accused of leaving a related anonymous message on regional councillor Pam Johnson's answering machine in June.

She turned the tape over to police.

The charge stems from an investigation launched by

police to determine the author of a controversial letter distributed by Ms. Johnson at a June 3 regional council meeting in Oakville.

The letter alleged high-ranking police officials covered up an apparent wife assault by a Halton police officer in 1983. A subsequent OPP investigation found no evidence to back up the cover-up charge.

The officer's charge of misconduct under the Police Services Act was put on hold at regional police headquarters in Oakville yesterday morning pending the outcome of the criminal charge.

He is scheduled to appear in Milton provincial court March 22.

School bus passenger injured

A 16-year-old girl was injured when a Laidlaw bus carrying school children went off the road in slippery conditions on Hwy. 401 Tuesday.

The bus from Markham was travelling on the westbound highway in Milton at 8:35 a.m. when the driver lost control, said Milton OPP.

The vehicle, which was carrying eight people, went into the north ditch. The girl was taken to Milton District Hospital with minor injuries.

Further information on the victim was not available at press time.

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