Police target jaywalkers after 23 pedestrian deaths

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Staff Writer

The average Joe may not take jaywalking seriously, but York cops do.

Plainclothed York Regional Police officers have been lurking around intersections high in pedestrian traffic this summer, ticketing those who step over the line.

So far, 25 people have been charged for various infractions and face fines ranging from $40 to $90.

The initiative was launched in the wake of 23 pedestrian deaths in less than four years, said Staff-Sgt. Thomas Carrique, head of the traffic enforcement bureau.

"The number of pedestrian fatalities on York Region roads has been higher than previous years, partly because of an increase of people moving into the area and the use of public transit," he said. "We take this very seriously. Six pedestrians have been killed on York Region roads this year and if ticketing people for these violations gets the message out that safety comes first, then we might be able to save some lives."

Between 2000 and 2003, 17 pedestrians lost their lives on York Region roads, with another six fatalities so far this year.

But those tragic statistics weren't enough to stop Richmond Hill resident Euclide Cormier from crossing against the light at the busy intersection of Major Mackenzie Avenue and Yonge Street Tuesday morning.

He was almost hit by a vehicle turning left on an advanced green.

"It's always an emergency. Everyone's always in a hurry," he said, explained himself. "If I get a fine, I will pay it but soon, they will forget about it. (The police) are concerned about it now, but they will drop it soon, just like anything else."

Staff.-Sgt. Carrique doesn't think so.

The force's pedestrian safety plan may slow down with winter when there are fewer pedestrians on the streets, he said.

But policing pedestrians is also part of the traffic bureau's regular routine.

Richmond Hill resident and regular transit rider Bob Bowd said he always obeys road safety regulations when crossing and understands why police are enforcing the law.

Still, he believes the police budget is better spent elsewhere.

"The are a number of other problems in York Region and I think the force would be better off putting their limited resources to resolve them," he said.

Mr. Bowd witnessed a local television crew filming officers as they ticketed jaywalkers at Major Mackenzie and Yonge just a few weeks ago, but they were only around for 10 minutes.

"It was a setup for the media," he said. "I don't think they're really out here all the time."

Monarch Vyas, 17, has been using York's transit system to get to work at Paramount Canada's Wonderland in Vaughan all summer.

He said he'll jaywalk on small streets, but never at major intersections and doesn't have a problem with officers ticketing those who do.

"If that's what police are doing, that's fine," he said. "It is against the law."

Some pedestrians have become upset when ticketed by police, Staff-Sgt. Carrique said. But the majority have a positive reaction to the program.

"I think most of them understand we're trying to put safety first," he said.

According to police, putting safety first for pedestrians means crossing at traffic signals, crosswalks and stop signs, making eye contact with drivers before stepping off the curb and waiting for vehicles to stop before crossing.

It also means wearing bright or reflective clothing, especially at night and, whenever possible, using sidewalks.

If you must walk on a roadway, always do so facing traffic, police said.

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