

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Heavy hand won't stop heavy feet

The early snowfall this winter has been accompanied by a surge in weather-related accidents.

In the blizzard on the weekend of Dec. 16, York Regional Police investigated 43 crashes, none involving serious injuries. Ontario Provincial Police responded to more than 680 collisions, none fatal.

Last Thursday, a quick, heavy snowfall shut down Hwy. 400 between King Road and Hwy. 9, as more than 25 vehicles were involved in crashes. Once again, none involved serious injuries.

The OPP said there were more than 50 crashes on GTA highways in two hours that day.

Clearly, a lot of drivers in the GTA don't slow down to suit the conditions.

Which is why OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino is proposing new laws to allow police to charge a person who gets into an accident by not driving according to weather conditions.

The charge would not be as serious as careless driving, but more along the lines of following too closely or making an illegal lane change. A similar law exists in New York.

Perhaps allowing a more serious penalty for speeding in bad conditions would be effective, but what is being suggested is charging a driver for not slowing down enough.

It's highly subjective. An officer could presumably charge a driver who was

doing 60 km-h in a 100 km-h zone if, in the officer's opinion, the weather merits driving 40 km-h.

But, as was the case last Thursday, weather conditions can change very quickly — and often a light dusting can render the roads more dangerous than a prolonged snow dump.

Yes, there have been a lot of weather-related accidents lately — and yet, no deaths and no serious injuries.

Possibly because, as OPP Const. Dave Woodford told us, the overwhelming majority of bad weather crashes are single vehicles going off the road and into ditches or guardrails.

On the other hand, three people were left in critical condition in a head-on crash on Hwy. 9 last Friday — on clear dry roads with perfect visibility.

If you lose control on a slippery section of road and go into a ditch, perhaps the waiting, the tow truck bill, the cost of body work, the scare and possibly the bumps and bruises are penalty enough, without being charged by police.

Perhaps a public awareness campaign about driving for road conditions might do more good. The province could produce advertising featuring real photographs of four-wheel-drive vehicles upside-down in ditches to counteract the car commercials that suggest SUVs are impervious to weather.

Mr. Fantino's proposal is just another attempt to legislate common sense.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS...

- Unite Party
- Work on Image
- Take a stand
- Don't be bullied
- Improve English



- NONE.
ALREADY
PERFECT.



Paperless society promised us looked good on paper

Remember the 'paperless society' promised to us when computers, electronic banking and e-mail began to appear?

That was 15 years ago or so. Or maybe it was 20. (I know I wrote it down somewhere. I guess I lost that piece of paper.)

It looked good on paper, but in the end, I don't think the paperless society worked out.

At the time, talk of a paperless anything kind of scared me. I mean, what about all those lumberjacks and paper mill workers? How would they survive?

Not only that but, how was I to keep track of anything else in my life if all I had was electronic records — bits, chips and bytes?

The truth is, I need this stuff! It's a matter of trust and frankly, I don't trust people. I need that piece of paper just to show people that, no, there was no mistake, I did, in fact, graduate from university and this is my diploma, I did, in fact,

deposit that money to cover all those cheques that I did, in fact, write and this is my bank statement, I am, in fact, the father of these children and have not in fact stolen them, even if they are better looking than I am and more intelligent, and here are the birth certificates to prove it.

I need a piece of paper in the form of a receipt so that when I'm walking out of the mall, no big burly security guy comes running from across the way and tackles me like he's a Patriots linebacker.

"I'm not stealing! I've got the receipt right..." I blurt out, just as he flattens me, cracking my ribs and loosening several old fillings.

"But you didn't have your item in a plastic bag," he tells me later, as the ambulance guys prep me for transport.

"I was trying to cut down on my plastics use," I mumble through several loose teeth.

That's the way I view all this paper — as if, some day, it is going



Bernie O'Neill

to save my life or keep me out of jail.

Withdrawal slips spit out by bank machines, pay stubs from direct deposits, receipts from gas purchases (for income tax purposes), credit card slips for the stuff I've charged, and on and on.

People and businesses seem reluctant to give it all up. It's a massive pile that serves as a record of my life.

I keep it all in a shoebox on top of the fridge and rummage through it at tax time or if some purchase

goes on the fritz. Even if the paper is simply stacked up in various places, shoved into assorted drawers, or sitting in cardboard boxes, it still seems important to people.

Before when I dealt in cash, I bought something and gave paper to the person I was buying the stuff from. The paper was called money, \$5 bills, \$10 bills.

Now I often give them a plastic card and they still give me paper in return, in the form of a receipt.

The paper exchange has become one way. It doesn't seem fair.

Meanwhile we have a fax machine here at the office that still goes through paper like it is going out of style. When, in fact, it is not.

Even e-mail doesn't help. When we get something really good, what do we do? We print it out.

Digital photography? We'll need to make a print.

I know a few people with Black-Berrys. They still seem to have just as much paper piled on their desks.

The advent of recycling makes all this paper consumption much easier to swallow (not that I am advocating swallowing as a method of recycling).

And paper is, after all, biodegradable, so that is a good feature.

Things are slowly changing as we trust electronic records and communicate more by e-mail. But it is taking time.

One great thing about the holidays is that, besides the bills, there's sometimes an actual personal letter in the mail.

It is handwritten, in an envelope with other paper — interesting newspaper articles clipped out for me about people I know and there might even be pieces of paper inside with pictures of the Queen on them, for my sons to spend.

When I grab this letter out of the mailbox, it's like I've found a little bar of gold — something genuine that took care to prepare, produced especially for me.

Long live paper.

LETTERS POLICY

The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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