

DRIVE ALIVE: WINTER DRIVING

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation recently released the 2008 NWT Traffic Collision Facts report. The 2008 collision report presents statistics that we should all take seriously.

Each year, Mr. Speaker, through our Drive Alive travel safety awareness program and other initiatives, the Department of Transportation works hard to provide residents with the information they need to travel safely on the NWT's roads, trails, and waterways. Nevertheless, people are injured or die needlessly each year because they failed to make simple choices that would have improved their chances of arriving safely at their destination.

Two of the most important choices to make this winter, Mr. Speaker, are simply to drive to the conditions of the road and to pay attention. As the winter driving season approaches and the temperature drops – especially right now with temperatures hovering around freezing – there is a significant risk of slippery and hazardous conditions on the road. It is easy to forget, Mr. Speaker, after the sunny days of summer, how different the roads are in the winter. Every year there a number of winter accidents that could have been avoided. Too many of these accidents are single vehicle collisions where drivers have been driving too fast or not driving to the conditions of the road.

Before getting on the road, Mr. Speaker, I would urge everyone to check the road and weather reports on the Department's website. It is important to remember that weather conditions can change quite dramatically over even a short period of time. Just because the roads were clear in the morning does not mean they will be clear that evening. In the winter months especially, speed is always a concern. When cars are moving too fast, it can be difficult to maintain control of a vehicle in bad weather. It is better to arrive late than not arrive at all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, along with the choice to drive to conditions is to ensure that you are not distracted from your primary responsibility to pay attention to the road ahead. Being distracted, for instance by eating, reading, texting, or anything else that takes your attention off the road while driving, reduces and sometimes removes the ability to react to sudden or unexpected conditions or obstacles.

Another important safety choice to make this winter is to ensure that everyone in the vehicle is wearing a seat belt or a properly installed child car seat or infant restraint. Seat belts help reduce the severity of injuries from vehicle collisions – that is why the law requires their use. Mr. Speaker, not everyone knows that the most important thing they can do to avoid injury or even death in a vehicle accident is to buckle up.

To address these concerns Mr. Speaker, the Drive Alive program is working with our law enforcement community on an initiative called “Buckle-Up NWT”. The objective of this new program is to use awareness and, where necessary, enforcement, to bring the NWT’s seat belt use up to the national average of 90% by 2012. Currently, our seat belt use ranges from 85% in large community settings to the mid-60s in smaller communities.

Mr. Speaker, of particular concern to me is the fact that on the road approximately two thirds of all children are not properly secured. It doesn’t matter whether it is a parent or a grandparent or a caregiver who is transporting a child – no one should make the mistake of allowing children to travel unsecured. Our children deserve our protection.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing I would again urge every member of the Legislative Assembly and all of the residents of the Territory to be safe this winter season: drive appropriately for the conditions, avoid distractions, and buckle up. Remember, safety is no accident. We can all do more to reduce the risk of a collision. Please Drive Alive!

Mahsi cho.