

# SafetyCanada

THE MEMBER NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADA SAFETY COUNCIL

JULY 2015

VOL. LIX No. 3

## Time to Get Serious About Photo Radar



If you follow online comments sections, photo speed enforcement is a touchy and divisive issue. Cash grab or potential life-saver? The debate around speed cameras has a tendency to heat up quickly.

The perceived controversy and a few early setbacks seem to have been enough to deter most Canadian jurisdictions from getting too enthusiastic about it. A notable exception is Alberta, where photo speed enforcement is used extensively in many municipalities. Edmonton has one of the longest running programs, and currently operates 50 fixed red light cameras that also enforce speed on green, in addition to 27 mobile units.

“A lot of people don’t believe it slows people down,” Dennis Tetreault, speed management supervisor with Edmonton’s Office of Traffic Safety.

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## President's Perspective

As we head into the summer months, fatal collisions on our road networks begin their upward creep. Speed is a contributing factor in about a third of fatal collisions, yet speeding is often perceived as being a minor problem, so long as a driver is otherwise driving safely. In surveys, most drivers will admit to speeding from time to time, even while agreeing that speed is a major contributing factor for collisions.

We also know that drivers tend to overrate their own competence -- with the vast majority of us considering our driving skill to be above-average. It's one more manifestation of the phenomenon psychologists call Illusory Superiority or the Above-Average Effect. Feeling above-average may be good for our self-esteem, but it isn't good for road safety, because when we think we're "good drivers" we give ourselves permission to speed (and engage in other risky behaviours too), figuring we're able to handle the extra risk.

When we do speed, we make it more difficult for others to obey the limit, thereby contributing to a road culture that is tolerant of speeding. By choosing to speed, we help to bump up the average speed of travel for that stretch of roadway, increasing the collision risk for ourselves and other road users too.

Basic physics tells us that even a modest increase in speed greatly increases stopping distance and collision severity. When something unexpected appears on the roadway, the difference of even a few kilometres an hour can be the difference between life and death.

So taking into account our natural tendency to take liberties with the posted speed limit, and the big benefit to road safety when we don't, what can be done? Although it can be tempting to think otherwise, we know it's not the severity of the punishment that deters, but the certainty of punishment. Currently, some severe punishments for speeding are on the books -- big fines, demerit points that affect your insurance, and even roadside vehicle seizure in the most egregious cases. But in most Canadian jurisdictions, it's the certainty of punishment that is lacking. Speeding continues to be a ubiquitous traffic offense that goes unpunished more often than not.

Police officers can't be everywhere all the time. That's why automated speed enforcement is a tool with enormous untapped potential for improving road safety. The Canada Safety Council has been behind automated speed enforcement from the get go. Properly planned and deployed, speed cameras save lives.

Until we see more widespread adoption of speed cameras, we can each do our small part to reduce speeding in our communities. Stick to the speed limit and you will help others to stick to the limit too.

*Safety, It's an Attitude*



Jack Smith, President

*Time to Get Serious About Photo Radar, continued from page 1*

“But we’ve seen it happen. We have seen what we call speed profiles shift after putting in photo radar.”

Tetreault points out that photo speed enforcement is just one tool in a continuum of measures the city uses, going from public education, signage, clearly marked “community enforcement vehicles” to covert mobile units for most persistent problem areas. “We want drivers to be successful,” he says. “We’re not trying to trick them. We want them to slow down. That’s why we’re there.”

If safety-minded politicians are worried about political fall-out, perhaps they can take courage in public opinion polls that suggest most Canadians do understand the benefits of automated speed enforcement, and are ready to accept some form of it in their communities.

A 2014 unpublished Edmonton survey found a majority of residents supported automated speed enforcement, with 78 per cent of those polled either strongly agreeing or agreeing that traffic cameras at intersections should be used to enforce speeding. For photo enforcement outside of intersections, 61 per cent of residents were in support.

The results of those opinion polls are not out of line with what other jurisdictions have found after installing photo radar. In Quebec after a pilot photo radar project in 2009, more than 80 per cent of people surveyed were in favour of using photo-radar and red-light camera systems at intersections. In Winnipeg, a 2009 poll conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation uncovered 81 per cent support for a continuation of the city’s pilot photo enforcement program. Surprisingly, even among people who had received a speeding ticket in the program, the majority (74 per cent) still supported it.

**Speed cameras outside Alberta**

Quebec operates 15 speed cameras across the province, with a plan to expand to 37 cameras this year.

The City of Winnipeg operates 10 mobile speed cameras.

In Saskatchewan, a pilot program is currently underway with eight units distributed across Regina, Moose Jaw and Saskatoon.

In British Columbia, a speed camera program introduced in 1995 lasted six years before a change in government led to the demise of the program in 2001.

Similarly, Ontario introduced speed cameras in 1994 but the unpopular program was abolished 11 months after a change in government.

Opponents of photo radar bring up the same standard arguments across jurisdictions. **Here are the most common.**

**“Photo radar is just a government cash grab.”**

Photo radar allows authorities to penalize more speeders, more efficiently than manual enforcement. So it’s no secret photo radar tickets generate revenue for any jurisdiction that puts it in.

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The reduction in health care costs, rehabilitation, police investigation, and court costs make automated enforcement all the more worthwhile.

In response to this kind of criticism, some jurisdictions have set aside the revenue from automated enforcement to be used exclusively on funding traffic safety measures. The town of Canmore, Alberta, itemizes programs funded through photo radar on its website. In the eight years since the town started using photo radar, it has spent \$1.4 million in revenue, with the benefits including the purchase of mobile speed display signs, new pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and funding an additional RCMP officer for the town's detachment.

**“If safety was really the goal, then all camera sites should be highly publicized and conspicuous.”**

Any rollout of a speed camera program should include a large publicity campaign and grace period to allow drivers to become aware of the new measures, and adjust their driving accordingly. Where photo radar is installed in problem intersections, camera locations should be well marked.

However, there can be a role for covert speed cameras as an element of uncertainty around precisely where cameras are located may help achieve reductions in speeding across the road network, not only in the vicinity of known or fixed speed traps.


The evidence to support the effectiveness of photo radar is compelling and conclusive. A 2012 Cochrane review of 35 international studies on the effectiveness of speed cameras found consistent reductions in speed and crash outcomes across all 35 studies.

**“If someone is endangering life by speeding, someone should stop them immediately, not mail them a ticket.”**

Having photo radar does not preclude manual enforcement where warranted. Manual speed enforcement is dangerous for officers and can lead to even greater risk to life when a high speed chase ensues. Benefits of automated speed enforcement include better enforcement coverage and an increased likelihood a problem speeder will be caught.

In a 2010 study of Quebec's pilot project of fixed and mobile photo radar, investigators observed a 99 per cent reduction of 'excessive speeding' occurrences during the study period.

According to a Transportation Authority of Canada study on the Quebec pilot project, installing these photo radar/red light systems at 15 locations “prevents one fatality, three serious injuries and 61 minor injuries annually. It also generates net proceeds of \$1M and intangible benefits of \$9.8M annually.”

The only question remains, why aren't more jurisdictions pursuing photo radar speed enforcement? 



## Just because it's legal, doesn't make it... safe

In May, the math genius John Nash, featured in the 2001 film “A Beautiful Mind,” was killed in a car crash in New Jersey. He and his wife were both ejected from the taxi they had been riding in when it crashed. They were not wearing seat belts. Though the investigation is ongoing, suffice to say their odds of survival would have been much improved had they been belted in. The taxi driver, who reportedly was wearing his seatbelt, survived.

In many U.S. jurisdictions, it is perfectly legal for taxi passengers to go unbelted. So what's the situation with taxi seat belt laws here in Canada?


Turns out that *passengers* in taxi cabs are required to belt up almost everywhere in Canada, but taxi *drivers* are usually permitted to drive unbelted while they are carrying fare-paying passengers. The rationale is that taxi drivers might need to be unbelted to fend off an attack from an aggressive passenger.

Taxi drivers in PEI, New Brunswick, Yukon and Newfoundland do not enjoy this seat belt exemption. In Quebec, taxi drivers can be unbelted while carrying fare-paying passengers in urban areas, but must be belted on numbered highways.

These strange loopholes in seat belt laws weren't the only ones we came across.

Like the exception for taxi cab drivers, many appear to be holdovers from the early days of seat belt legislation when appeasing interest groups was a political necessity.

Here are a few other seat belt exemptions:

- Carrying **more passengers than there are seat belts** in the vehicle is legal in the Yukon and PEI.
- People can legally **ride in the bed of a pickup truck** in Newfoundland and the Yukon. It's legal for workers to ride in the box of a truck in Alberta “where the nature of the person's occupation requires the person to ride in the box of a truck.” In New Brunswick, workers can ride on or in part of the vehicle not designed for passengers if they're being transported to and from a work site.
- People with **medical conditions** may apply for seat belt exemptions in most of Canada. BC and Ontario recently closed this loophole, following the advice of the Canadian Medical Association, which has stated that “there are no medical conditions that justify exemption from wearing a seat belt.” 



## CSC News

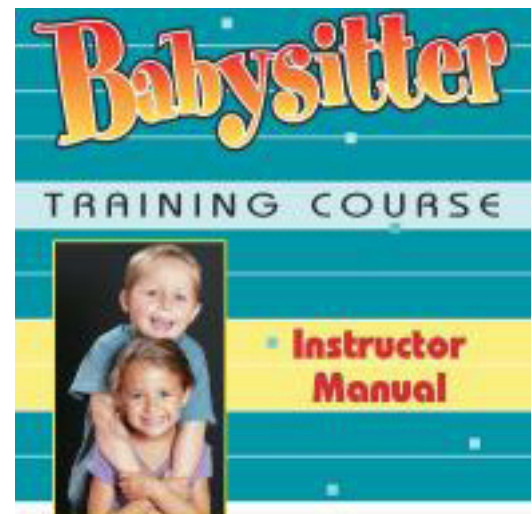
May 1 to 7 was **National Summer Safety Week** and this year's campaign focussed on the importance of wearing lifejackets while boating. We distributed news releases to media outlets accompanied by a digital poster. We also intensified our social media output this year, releasing a series of infographics over the week to accompany key messages that life-jackets should be worn by everyone in a boat, regardless of the weather, perceived boating or swimming skill.



National collision statistics continue to show that progress has been slow to stagnant when it comes to vulnerable road users. So for this year's **National Road Safety Week** (May 12-18), we kept with the theme of vulnerable road users but directed the messaging at motorists. The slogan "The way you drive can save lives" was adopted and used in the campaign, encouraging motorists to "Drive Like a Hero."

In June, we welcomed summer student Amanda Speroni to the office. She comes to us from Algonquin College's public relations program and will be with us until September when she returns to school to complete her final year.

Several of our courses are undergoing materials updating and revisions. The off-road training section is working on creating a new ATV manual, the Babysitters Course training materials are in revisions and new materials should be ready for distribution this fall. The traffic division is also working on updating the 55-Alive Training materials.



In August, we will be saying farewell to Lynn Lau who will be leaving the position of Media and Communications Coordinator due to her spouse's impending work relocation to Saskatchewan. We wish her and her family the best of luck and a safe journey.



## CSC News

On July 1, CSC staff attended a Canada Day festival in the east Ottawa neighbourhood of Pineview, with a retro-reflective crafting activity supported by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Road Safety Challenge. Approximately 150 children and adults visited our tent to create retroreflective bracelets and decorate their bicycles and helmets with retroreflective stickers. We also distributed materials on bike and pedestrian safety. This was an opportunity to develop and field test a public engagement kit that will be made available to partner organizations for National School Safety Week in October.



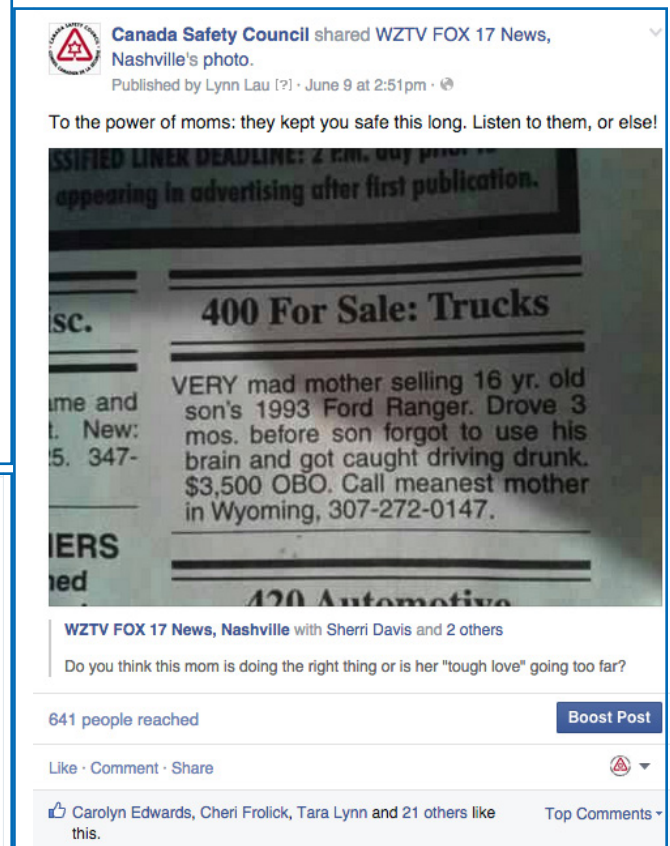
## Safety Training Online

*Want to go back to school without leaving home?*

*Visit [www.canadasafetycouncil.org/training](http://www.canadasafetycouncil.org/training)*

*to sign up for online safety training! Courses include OH&S topics, defensive driving, babysitters training, and home alone safety.*

## Popular on Social Media



*Do you have a safety story, tip or pet-peeve to share?  
Email [media@safety-council.org](mailto:media@safety-council.org), tweet us @CanadaSafetyCSC or send us a post  
or a message on our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/canada.safety>.*



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ISSN: 0048-8968  
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