SAFETY CANADA

THE MEMBER NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADA SAFETY COUNCIL

OCTOBER 2026 VOL. LXX NO. 4



SAME ROUTINE, DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

October changes the conditions around us quickly.

The commute may follow the same route. The walk from the parking lot has not moved. Outdoor work still needs to get done, and the furnace that kept the house warm last year returns to service. Yet the environment in which we do these things can look very different from one week to the next.

Daylight disappears earlier. Rain makes roads and walkways slick. Wet leaves collect on pavement. Overnight temperatures begin dropping toward freezing. Morning frost can give way to a mild afternoon, while weather conditions can change considerably over the course of a single day.

For safety, those changes matter. Consider the road. Ontario's Ministry of Transportation notes that drivers cannot see as far ahead at night or in rain, snow or fog, even with headlights. Rain can also reduce tire contact with the road and make surfaces slippery. The practical response is straightforward: reduce speed when conditions require it, increase following distance and leave yourself enough space to stop within the distance you can see.

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PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: SAFETY RARELY FAILS ALL AT ONCE



There's a point in many everyday situations when the conditions around a task change, even when the task itself does not.

A familiar drive home, for example, becomes more demanding when darkness comes earlier, when rain reduces visibility or when traffic is heavier than expected. A routine job becomes less forgiving when a worker is tired, their equipment needs maintenance and deadlines are approaching.

None of these factors necessarily cause an incident on their own. But when they begin to overlap, that's where the concerns begin to kick in.

The reality in safety is that serious incidents do not often begin suddenly, with one dramatic failure as the catalyst. Rather, several smaller protections weaken at the same time, increasing the risk factors steadily but often silently.

This is not a new concept — established Canadian organizations including the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety and the Transportation Safety Board recommend layered approaches and multiple safety measures to avoid relying on a single safeguard. Complexity is made safer where redundant safety systems are installed.

We all rely on layers of protection every day, so often that they rarely even cross our minds. We leave enough distance between our vehicle and the one we're following, to allow ourselves time to react when safety risks being compromised.

We maintain equipment before an incident occurs, allowing it to perform when needed. Alarm, detectors, procedures, training, time buffers in workflows… the list goes on.

The challenge, however, exists when those margins begin to disappear. Naturally, we compensate by borrowing from elsewhere.

We drive faster when we're late, we postpone maintenance because the machinery operates well enough for now, we rely on experience even when a fresh assessment is needed.

As we move through autumn, consider that many margins are shrinking in our day-to-day routines. We have less daylight with which to operate, road and weather conditions become less predictable, seasonal demands necessitate workplace adjustments.

Good safety practice means noticing change early enough to respond to it. Ask what has shifted and which safeguards you're relying upon. Then, consider what happens should one of them fail.

We can't eliminate every risk. We can make sure that one missed step, one unexpected condition or one moment of poor judgment doesn't have to stand alone between an ordinary day and a serious incident, an injury or a fatality.

The margin matters most before it is gone.

Make Safety a Priority!



Gareth Jones
President and CEO



Same Routine, Different Conditions (Continued from page 1)

National collision data underline why the autumn transition deserves attention. Transport Canada's analysis of collision patterns from 2011 to 2020 found that injury collisions were among their annual peaks in October and November.

Outside the vehicle, changing surfaces create another seasonal consideration. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety specifically identifies frost, wet leaves, ice and shortened daylight as conditions that can increase slip-and-trip hazards during autumn and winter. Suitable footwear, clear walkways, adequate lighting and a pace appropriate to the surface all become more important as conditions deteriorate.

Seasonal changes follow us indoors as well.

Health Canada says the risk of indoor carbon monoxide exposure is greatest during colder months, including fall and winter, when Canadians rely more heavily on fuel-burning heating appliances. Furnaces, fireplaces and other equipment should be properly maintained and vented, and carbon monoxide alarms should be installed and kept in working order.

Workplaces face many of these same physical changes. Outdoor surfaces become wet or icy. Available daylight shifts. Cold can affect both workers and equipment. Jobs that were comfortably completed outside in September may require different scheduling, lighting, footwear, equipment or procedures later in the season.

None of these adjustments needs to be complicated.

Check the forecast before heading out. Allow more travel time when visibility or traction is poor. Clear leaves and other debris from walking surfaces. Make sure exterior lighting works before darker evenings arrive. Inspect seasonal equipment before relying on it. Review outdoor tasks when temperature, light or surface conditions change.

Autumn is a transition season, and transitions call for attention to what is physically different.

The calendar does not make an activity unsafe. The conditions can change what that activity demands.

As October moves toward colder, darker months, the safest approach is a practical one: match the way you drive, work, walk and maintain your home to the conditions you actually have.



VEHICLE & ROAD SAFETY

WHEN THE COMMUTE GETS DARK

Darkness changes the road before it changes the traffic on it. People are still walking home, cycling, waiting for buses and crossing intersections during the evening commute. Drivers are still making turns, watching signals and moving through busy streets.

As autumn progresses, more of those interactions happen after sunset. That changes what a driver can detect and how early they can detect it.

In 2023, Transport Canada recorded 298 pedestrian fatalities and 47 cyclist fatalities. Together, pedestrians and cyclists accounted for 17.6 per cent of all road deaths in Canada and more than 20 per cent of serious injuries.

There is evidence of a seasonal effect as daylight declines, too. Toronto's Vision Zero Annual Report indicates that pedestrian collisions increase by more than 30 per cent during evening commute hours from November through March.

The challenge is more specific than simply "driving at night." Overdriving your headlights, or travelling at a speed where your stopping distance extends farther than the roadway you can actually see, is a notable concern. Reflective signs may remain visible well ahead while a pedestrian, cyclist, animal or unlit object is much harder to identify.

Intersections add another dimension. A driver preparing to turn may be watching an oncoming vehicle, checking a traffic signal, judging a gap and positioning the vehicle at the same time. In low light, a pedestrian or cyclist can be more difficult to pick out.

That makes the approach to a turn important. Reduce speed before entering it. Scan the full crossing area rather than only the traffic lane. Confirm the path is clear before moving.

Daytime running lights are designed primarily to make a vehicle more visible in good conditions; they are not a substitute for the full lighting system. Depending on the vehicle, relying on them may also mean rear lights are not illuminated. Drivers should know how their automatic lighting system operates and periodically confirm that headlights, tail lights and signal lights are working.

People walking and cycling can improve their visibility with lights and reflective materials, particularly outside well-lit areas. Those measures help drivers detect them sooner, but drivers still need to operate at a speed that allows enough time to respond to what enters the illuminated roadway.

Defensive driving depends in part on seeing, being seen and creating enough space to react.



For many families, staying home alone for the first time is a meaningful step toward independence.

By October, school-year routines have often settled into place. Parents know their work schedules, children know their after-school routines and families may begin considering whether an older child can manage a short period at home without direct adult supervision.

The tempting question is: how old should they be? Age matters, including because child-supervision requirements vary across Canada. But it cannot answer the readiness question by itself.

Two children of the same age can differ considerably in how comfortable they feel alone, how reliably they follow instructions and how they respond when something unexpected happens. A child who can handle a quiet hour after school may not yet be comfortable being alone after dark. Someone ready to care for themselves may not be ready to look after a younger sibling.

Readiness is about what a child can actually manage. Can they enter the home securely, follow agreed-upon rules and use basic appliances safely? Do they know their address and how to contact a parent, caregiver or another trusted adult? Can they recognize which situations they can handle independently and which require help?

Then move beyond the routine. A plan that only works when everything goes as expected leaves an important gap. Children should know what to do if they smell smoke, someone is injured, an alarm sounds or they suddenly feel unsafe or unsure. They should know when to call 911 and when to contact a trusted adult instead.

How a child feels about the arrangement matters too. Reluctance or anxiety should not be treated as something they simply need to get over. Independence works best when the young person understands what is expected and feels capable of meeting those expectations.

Parents can build toward that point gradually. Begin with a short absence while remaining nearby and reachable. Talk afterward about what went well and what felt uncertain. Increase the time only when both parent and child are comfortable doing so.

Training can help provide some of that foundation. The Canada Safety Council's Home Alone Program, designed for children age 10 and older, uses discussion, problem-solving and practical scenarios to help young people prepare for short periods on their own. Note that a course can build knowledge and confidence; it does not replace a parent or caregiver's assessment.

YOUTH SAFETY TRAINING

Safety training for our youth remains important in building their confidence and life skills. We offer programs for youth to build their skills, including Babysitter training, Home Alone training, and more!

Visit canadasafetycouncil.org/product-category/youth/



Winter preparation at work should begin before the conditions that make it necessary.

For organizations with outdoor workers, vehicles, equipment or weather-dependent operations, autumn offers a valuable window to look ahead. The goal is to make sure people, equipment and procedures are ready before conditions become difficult.

Identify hazards associated with extreme cold and winter weather in advance. That can include outdoor work, travel, driving, cold equipment and changing weather. Preparation may involve emergency plans, appropriate clothing and protective equipment, maintained vehicles and worker training.

The details will differ by workplace. A construction employer may need to review outdoor scheduling and warming areas. A delivery operation may need to inspect vehicles and revisit winter-driving expectations. Facilities teams may need to prepare entrances and work areas for snow and ice. Organizations whose employees travel between locations should also consider how weather conditions and decisions about postponing travel will be communicated.

Equipment deserves the same advance attention. Transport Canada recommends putting vehicles into top working condition before winter, including brakes, lighting, heating and defrosting systems, wipers and tires.

Few workplaces illustrate the importance of preparation more clearly than winter road maintenance.

The Canada Safety Council's **Winter Service Driver Improvement Course** (WSDIC) gives organizations a structured way to prepare new and experienced drivers. The program covers defensive driving and collision prevention, vehicle inspections, factors influencing driver performance, salting and Direct Liquid Application, and basic snowplow and winging techniques.

Looking Ahead

Our annual Fall campaign season is in the offing! Here's what you can expect:

National School Safety Week (October 17-23**)**: This year's campaign will focus on the shared responsibility of families, schools, municipalities and drivers to create safer school travel for every child in Canada.

National Community Safety & Crime Prevention Month (November**)**: Artificial intelligence is transforming how Canadians work, communicate and access information. Unfortunately, it is also giving criminals new ways to deceive. This campaign will delve into the impact that AI-enabled impersonation scams are having on the digital safety landscape.

National Senior Safety Week (November 6-12**)**: Emergency preparedness is the focus, specifically surrounding the impacts on our senior community. We'll offer tips on what questions we can ask ourselves to best prepare for the unexpected.

National Home Fire Safety Week (November 24-30**)**: Rechargeable devices are everywhere in our homes. This year, we'll look at how Canadians can reduce fire risks when buying, charging, storing and disposing of lithium-ion batteries.

Throughout, we'll also be engaging in safety training. The motorcycle and ATV seasons may be winding down, but the snowmobile and winter service seasons are just starting. Safety doesn't take seasonal breaks and neither do we!

SAFETY CANADA



You cannot see, smell or taste radon. You also cannot tell whether your home has a problem without testing for it. That makes fall an important time to act.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas released as uranium in soil and rock breaks down. Outdoors, it disperses into the air. Inside buildings, it can enter through openings where the structure contacts the ground and accumulate to potentially harmful levels.

Health Canada identifies radon as the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. And new Canadian research suggests elevated exposure is considerably more common than earlier estimates indicated.

The 2024 Cross-Canada Survey of Radon Exposure found that approximately 17.8 per cent of Canadian houses tested at or above the national guideline of 200 becquerels per cubic metre.

Radon levels varied substantially by region and building type, but elevated readings were found across the country.

The only way to know your home's level is to measure it. Health Canada recommends a long-term test lasting at least three months. Fall and winter are ideal because the test should capture conditions during the heating season. Place the detector on the lowest level of the home where someone spends at least four hours a day, following the manufacturer's instructions.

Health Canada reports that more than 90 per cent of Canadian homeowners have never tested their homes.

Some household hazards announce themselves immediately. Radon does not. Knowing whether it is present at an elevated level begins with a small detector and enough time to get an accurate answer.

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ISSN: 0048-8968
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