

Alderman tired of sliding

Colley-Urquhart driving bid to make winter treads a must

By RICK BELL

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Ward Tires manager Dwayne Ewaskiuk will be a busy guy if Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart gets her way. (Lyle Aspinall/Calgary Sun)

Big Red says she's serious, really serious. She says she's not doing it to get ink on a page.

But, after the slip-sliding away of the past couple weeks, Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart wants city council to push the province to make winter tires the law in Alberta.

At the Jan. 18 city council gabfest, Diane wants aldermen to direct municipal deep-thinkers to whip up arguments in favour of making winter tires mandatory in the snowy season.

The report would be done lickety-split and go to a committee of aldermen in February for a chew.

Then it would be back to council, off to Premier Ed and his king of the roads, Luke Ouellette, with the city pushing to change the province's Traffic Safety Act.

Ed and Luke are those with the thumbs needing to go up or down.

And, though a choir of voices around the water cooler will no doubt look to their wallets this day and utter a last outrage before the Yuletide, Big Red says she has already consulted with city administration and they're ready if council is ready.

Some aldermen are prepared to back a look-see.

In Diane's written proposal to council, she says "winter tires have proven their worth in terms of road safety" because they make it "possible to stop in a shorter distance with more control."

She points out Quebec requires passenger vehicles, taxis and rental cars registered in that province run on winter tires between Dec. 15 and March 15.

Those who go south in winter can get a seven-day certificate to operate within Quebec without winter tires.

For those who stay and stick with all-seasons, fines range from \$200 to \$300.

Big Red mentions the stats from Quebec before their new law, where 38% of the accidents in winter involved at least one vehicle with all-season tires in a province where about nine in 10 used winter tires.

Of course, Quebec is Quebec and Alberta is very, very different. People here don't embrace government. They itch at the thought. Albertans came to seat-belts kicking and screaming and nixing nicotine in public areas once rivalled pulling teeth.

The province couldn't swallow a ban on using cellphones while driving and still haven't brought forward a ticket against distracted drivers despite saying they would.

They tippy-toe around distracted drivers. What do you think they'll do with all the people who do not want to be forced to buy winter tires? Yikes.

It was easier in Quebec. In Quebec, the vast majority had winter tires so the new law brought the minority into line with the majority. In Alberta, the majority do not have winter tires and so the majority would have to toe a new line.

None of this fazes Big Red. She also wants winter tires on buses and other equipment "pretzelling all over the road" and more bucks for plowing in the 2010 city budget.

"Some people think it's the wild, wild west where they can drive how they want and nobody is going to tell them what to do," she says, having grown up in the Alberta town of Oyen.

"But if you want to do it on a public road, you have to do your part to make the roads safer. This is a public safety issue. People can do what they want when it doesn't affect anybody, but when it involves the safety of others, it's a different story.

"They tried to do this with seatbelts and there wasn't a big uptake. They brought in a law and people were grumpy for awhile, but now it's second nature."

Of course, seatbelts were already in vehicles and this really isn't about safety. Winter tires ARE better than all- season tires on wintry roads. There is the cost, much higher than a tax hike or an off-leash dog tag. And deep down we all still hope for a chinook. It's in the Calgary DNA.

Ald. Gord Lowe says he will support Big Red and expects her brainwave to pass.

He wants to see what it says, but figures the province will put it on a shelf.

"It will give Calgarians something to think about," says Gord.

Thinking is one way of putting it.

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