


**THE AMERICAN EXPRESS® BUSINESS GOLD REWARDS CARD.
BUILT FOR BUSINESS OWNERS**

TRY IT FOR A YEAR. FREE.

[Apply Now](#)



Top cop focused on distraction

Hanson says e-nough to e-mailing behind wheel

By **RICK BELL**

Last Updated: 17th December 2009, 4:07am



Carly Jones, while parked, does us a favour by demonstrating the kind of idiotic behaviour we see too often behind the wheel. (LAURA PEDERSEN/CALGARY SUN)

City drivers and the province have to get their act together, says this city's top cop.

Police Chief Rick Hanson looks at the driving in Calgary and he doesn't like what he sees.

Neither do many of you. It's the No. 1 peeve Hanson hears from citizens.

The chief says drivers should take a look in the mirror and he wants the province to stop stalling and pass a law against distracted driving. They are still reviewing the issue.

Just so some of your veins don't pop, on the latest chatter about a city alderman pushing the province to make snow tires mandatory in the winter, Hanson says it's worth giving any evidence a once-over but that's as far as he'll go without seeing numbers showing a real reduction in collisions in Quebec, where it's the law.

The province has no plans to force Albertans to put on winter treads.

"These are recommended for use when the snow comes," says Premier Ed.

"But we rely on Albertans to practise responsible winter driving habits." The Calgary police are putting winter tires on their cars.

"We're moving toward that. We recognize it's an issue. It's something the officers have brought up and the installation has started," says the chief.

Back to Calgary drivers and distracted driving.

"What is dangerous and is proven dangerous are the distractions and they have to be legislated. It's time Alberta gets on the bandwagon and says enough is enough," says Hanson.

"Part of the problem is, without a doubt, distractions -- the cellphone, the BlackBerry, the texting, the e-mailing as you're driving.

"All of these things are still legal in Alberta. There has to be more attention focused on distracted driving."

Hanson quickly answers those who say there already is a careless driving law.

"You can charge them with whatever you want but you won't get a conviction in court. It's just too serious a charge for when a guy weaves or does one thing when he's distracted."

But he doesn't want to bring down the hammer, writing tickets for driving with a coffee and putting a CD in the player. "Most people can manage that. Most people can be reasonable and have a coffee in the morning driving down Crowchild Tr. It probably relaxes you."

Here is where the chief gets going. Like many of us, there are many complaints within the one big beef.

"Everybody but everybody thinks they're the safe driver and it's the other idiots who need to be regulated. But everybody has to really sit back and look at their driving behaviour," he says.

"Everybody's got a reason. The No Left Turn Between 4 and 6 sign. They know it's there, but it's not for them. It's for somebody else."

Then there's cutting people off.

"There's the attitude all you've got to do is flip on your turn signal and move in."

Then there's the impatience.

"People can be good drivers 90% of the time, 95%. But it's the 5% when they become one of those people who is more of a menace because they're focused more on where they're going and less on their driving."

Don't forget about boneheads who don't adapt to winter conditions.

Hanson, who is from Calgary, remembers a winter 40 years ago when Calgary had 40-plus days where the mercury never went above zero on the Fahrenheit scale.

That's almost 20-below in Celsius talk.

"We've been spoiled. People either lost their skills or never developed them to the point they can navigate through lousy roads."

Double don't forget the city's traffic calming drill, where they do everything they can to force drivers on to already congested main arteries.

It drives the cops to distraction.

And this scribbler is allowed to ask about another itch needing scratching.

How tough is it to get a licence these days? Hanson gets it.

"I remember when having a licence was a privilege and not a right and you had to really meet a very strict standard to get that licence.

"Those examiners were tough. It's been a long time since I've talked to anybody who said they failed their driving test." Exactly.

Of course, the winter tire debate refuses to be forgotten.

As you are aware, Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart wants city council to arm-twist the province to make snow tires the law in winter.

"Is it part of a solution? It's worth a look. But I don't want people thinking slapping on a set of snow tires makes a person an expert in driving in bad road conditions," says Hanson.

After the better part of an hour, just like Calgarians, we finally get out of traffic.

Hanson still hopes for 41 cops in the upcoming provincial budget. The need is obvious.

"I don't want anybody to think the problems are over. We've got to keep the pressure on. We can no longer give up what we've taken back."

RICK.BELL@SUNMEDIA.CA

Copyright © 2009 Calgary Sun All Rights Reserved