



Source name

Oshawa This Week (Oshawa, ON) (web site)

Source type

Press • Online Press

Periodicity

Irregular

Geographical coverage

Local

Origin

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

Making road safety education a priority in Durham Region

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Now that Ontario has legalized cannabis, we must shift our conversation from the theoretical to reality such as keeping our roads safe. At CAA South Central Ontario that's what we're focused on, day in and day out.

We recently commissioned a study conducted by Ipsos that found Ontario drivers are concerned that the legalization of cannabis may impact their safety behind the wheel. Sixty-eight per cent believe there will be more cannabis-impaired drivers on the road following the legalization. In fact, the study revealed that 1.9 million Ontarians have driven under the influence of cannabis. Among current cannabis users, more than half feel that they drive worse than a sober driver when under the influence of cannabis.

With those concerns, we weren't surprised to hear that 60 per cent of respondents support investments in public education campaigns to encourage safe driving. That's why at CAA, education is our top priority.

One of our objectives is dispelling the myth that driving under the influence of cannabis is safer than driving after consuming alcohol or the belief that cannabis can sharpen one's ability behind the wheel. In actuality, the potential for a collision increases in direct proportion to THC levels in the body with cannabis significantly impacting cogni-

tive and motor functions.

The situation worsens for poly-users - those who combine cannabis and alcohol - who triple their collision risk compared to those who consume only one drug.

Bottom line: impairment by any measure is still impaired. It's best to approach cannabis the same way as alcohol - avoid it completely before getting behind the wheel.

It is also important to educate drivers about the fines and penalties for drug-impaired driving. Drivers determined to be impaired face immediate penalties including licence suspension, fines and even jail time. What's more, Ontario has a zero-tolerance approach for young and novice drivers found using cannabis.

Communities across Ontario are working hard to keep our roads safe, but our goal is only possible if we make public education key to our efforts. We hope you join us.

- Elliott Silverstein is manager, government relations, at CAA South Central Ontario.

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