



Announcer

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Enzo Garritano:

You're listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Join us again as we continue our conversation with Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Sergeant Kerry Schmidt on the subject of seasonal tips for driving, including weather, increased volume, and construction season.

Michelle Roberts:

What other tips do you have now to share with us knowing that the season's changing, we're getting into spring and nicer weather?

Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:

Well, for sure the further north you go, you're still going to see ice on some of the lakes, but a lot of the ice is decreasing rapidly. Although further Northern Ontario, there may be some ice still. But when it comes down to changing weather, and just the conditions that we're driving in right now, depending on what you're driving, as a bicyclist or a motorcyclist as well, there's still a lot of grit and sand and salt on the roads. There's going to be animals that are out licking salt. And you'll see them through rural areas as well.

But just making sure that you're always driving to within the conditions of the situation. We're going to have fog and rain and limited visibility conditions that can affect you to see what's up around the next bend or over the next rise. So if you're driving at night, making sure you're driving with your full headlight system on at all times so that your taillights are also visible.

This is particularly important, at all times, but in the rain and when vehicles are throwing some mist off behind their vehicles. It's hard to see them at the best of times. And if there's no illumination at the rear of their vehicle, it's very difficult to see what's going on. And if there's a speed differential, by the time you realize that you're approaching this vehicle, you may not have the ability to get out of the way in time. So that's one thing that we want people to realize and remember.

If you're going to start looking forward to spring activities, summer vacation, people are going to be hauling trailers and maybe going up to cottages and camps and so on, making sure everything is properly secured down. And even if it's secured down appropriately on your driveway, by the time you've gone around the block and made it towards the highway, things will settle down, the straps and the ropes may not be as tight as they were when you left. And so it's always good to go back and stop, after you've driven just a very short distance, to see what kind of vibrations have caused settling of those loads, and making sure those straps are properly secured down.

Always having emergency supplies, emergency kits in your vehicle, is there for those times when you need assistance. And knowing where you're going, having your route planned properly, and just having all the right pieces of the vehicle for you to not have concerns when you're going down the road.

A lot of people are going to be changing their tires very soon from the winter tires to their all-season tires. And if you're doing that at a shop, we always recommend you going back and having your wheel fasteners re-torqued and making sure they're properly installed. And if you're doing it yourself, again, it's so important that you do it properly, follow the manufacturer's instructions. And then, after you've driven a very short distance, take that tire iron or a torque wrench and make sure that every single fastener is on tight and according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Because too tight is a problem just as much as too loose is a problem. So be mindful of what you're doing out there.

And again, when the weather's up, and the convertible top is down, and the windows are down, and the radio's blasting, and everyone's having a great time, we just seem to forget about the importance of driving and the consequences of bad decisions. So just make sure you're sharing the road, make sure you have that awareness. And if you have a bunch of people in your vehicle all having a great time, that's good. We want you to have a good time, but you still need to make sure that you are following the rules of the road and you're aware of what's happening all around you at all times. So just be careful out there because the highways can be very unforgiving.

Michelle Roberts:

To add to that too, as we know, as the weather changes and we get to warmer days, we're going to see some of those more vulnerable road users. That's the terminology we use. And motorcyclists are one of those vulnerable road users. Right? They don't have as much protection, they don't have the ability... They don't have airbags surrounding them, like in our passenger vehicles, so something we need to be aware of as they increase.

Another vulnerable road user that IHSA is certainly very aware of that we want to protect is the construction worker. And we're going to get ready into full-on construction season soon enough in Ontario. And whether that's a temporary work zone or maybe a permanent road building, the infrastructure needs to be maintained in the province. And we have very vulnerable workers standing on the side of the road, maybe beside live traffic, and that's certainly something to be aware of. And what tips do you have there for drivers?

Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:

Well, again, anytime you see construction zones... And if you're a regular commuter and you drive the same route every day, you begin to become complacent again in your route. And all of a sudden one day, the lanes are going to change. There's going to be a lane shift, or a lane realignment, or something different, and you're not prepared for that. And that's often when we see an increase in collision.

And so it's not if you're traveling into a different province. If you're traveling an area that you're not familiar with, you're going to be paying super-hypersensitive attention to what the next sign is, where you're supposed to be, what lane exits, which lane that continues on because you don't know what's coming around the next bend. But if you drive this route the same day every day for years, you're not going to be ready for those changes because you're not even watching the road signs. So again, we just need to be aware of that, watch for those signs, be aware of flashing lights.

And again, for us as first responders on the highways, "*Slow Down, Move Over*," is a very important piece of legislation to keep first responders and emergency workers safe as well. So anytime you see

flashing lights, amber lights from a tow truck, red and blue lights from a police car or a fire truck or an ambulance, you're required to slow down as you approach, move into an adjacent lane if there's one available, proceed with caution as you're going by, be prepared to stop if necessary because we're there because of a crisis, because of an emergency, or maybe because of construction, and there may be a lane that's ending.

And very often, we have seen traffic slow down in areas of these new configurations. And when traffic slows down, we often see these end of queue crashes that catches drivers by surprise. So back behind where the lineup begins, a driver's going to be coming in full speed, not realizing it's coming to a dead stop. And that's where we have the most catastrophic and tragic outcomes when there's a collision. And if that happens within a construction zone, there's plenty of signage, but again drivers need to pay attention and be aware of those situations.

There may not be any shoulders as well. And that is something, if there is a collision, it's very difficult for emergency responders to actually get to the scene. In some cases, we're not even able to access the scene. We have to come from a different direction to find the crash site because the shoulders are nonexistent because of construction.

So be super careful with the changing speed limits. And just when you see those painted lines are orange, instead of white or yellow, you know you're in a construction zone. And so pay particular attention about that. Very often, speed limits will reduce for those areas, and it's important that you abide by those rules. You may think that you can still drive regular speed. But again, when things happen, it happens fast and you may not have that time to react when you need to.

Michelle Roberts:

No. And I think too, as we get into the summer season as well, and to avoid some of those frustrations you may have as a driver, and you get slowed down because of construction, which is a necessity... But there is some features out there. The MTO has a 511 app, which is a great device you could download to your phone before you leave for your trip.

And it does indicate, "What is my typical route? Where am I going? Is there construction zones in the wintertime?" You could track the plow you can see the road conditions, anything like that. Because that's an advanced practice I could do as a driver to maybe avoid that route, and keep trucking along as quickly as I want to get to my destination, and decrease some of that frustration I might experience when I'm out on the road.

Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:

Yeah, plan that route. Know where you're going. And whatever, if you're using Google Maps or Waze, or driving apps that'll give you your estimated time of arrival, that's a pretty easy way of understanding when you're going to get there.

And if that time tells you you're going to get there 20 minutes late, don't try to start driving in a manner that's going to shave off minutes because it is next to impossible to shave off any appreciable amount of time off that. Call ahead, call someone who's waiting for you, and say you're running 20 minutes late,

you'll get there when you get there, "This is my estimated time of arrival. There's some construction along the way."

And those kinds of apps, they will give you all kinds of updates with hazards on the road, construction zones, disabled vehicles, and they'll give you all kinds of information, even where police may be investigating a crash or doing enforcement. And I know officers as well, they sometimes even use the app themselves. And they will flag themselves as being an officer on the side of the road, so people know what to expect when they're in that area.

And so there's all kinds of ways. We don't want you to use that as an opportunity to now think you can do whatever you want where the police aren't there. But there is a lot of ways that you can use technology to assist you in your journey. And just knowing your route and knowing your detours, if you have to take alternate arrangements, you actually know how your highways are set up in your neighborhood. Because many people have one route to the office and back, and that's the only route they know. And every once in a while it might not be a bad idea to explore some alternate routes in case there is delays along your way.

Michelle Roberts:

Excellent. Well, thank you so much for those tips.

And just to remind you, if you're joining us, we're connected here with OPP Sergeant Kerry Schmidt, who's joining us from his cruiser right now. And we're reinforcing some of the best driving practices we can put in place to safely share the roads.

So thank you very much for sharing that information. Is there any last minute tips or final thoughts that you'd like to share with our listeners on road safety?

Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:

Well, do you know what? I've been in policing now for over 20 years, and I have seen almost everything, but then every day I see something that I've never seen before. There's so many variances out in the world. And we just want to get home at the end of our shift, just like you want to get home at the end of your day, wherever that takes you.

And so getting to and from your destinations is of utmost importance for you, your family, your loved ones. And we just ask everyone to really focus on what is important. Take a firm hold and realize there's people out there that love, you and they want to see you get home safely, and they don't want to see you getting in trouble, or taking chances and putting yourself at risk. So it's just not worth it.

And I have had to knock on far too many doors in my career, and officers all across the province have to do that far too often. And, like we started off this conversation with the number of people who had died, those are families that no longer have loved ones that are there to support and have memories with. And it really is unfortunate and tragic.

And so whatever we can do to change someone's behavior, to help them understand that they need to be part of the solution, share the road, know where you're driving, know what's going on, and get there safely, I can't emphasize that more. We're going to be out there doing enforcement, but we also want to

do education. It's not just about the hammer coming down and giving you a ticket. But if we can share the road safely, we're all going to be better off.

Michelle Roberts:

No, that's great. And that's one thing that the role that IHSA plays as an educator, is we want individuals, whether they drive for work or they have employees who drive for work, we want them to manage those risks that come with driving. And that it is preventable. Collisions are preventable if they apply best practices.

And so we have a whole suite of solutions that employers could take advantage of. Many of them are at no cost: in-classroom training, e-learning. We have safety tips, and policies, and procedures, and a whole road safety program to support workplace parties in ensuring that they get to their destinations, their work destinations, and most importantly that they get home safely at the end of the day. So I encourage anybody who has not seen our solutions to visit ihsa.ca/drivesafe.

Enzo Garritano:

Thank you, Sgt. Schmidt. That was fantastic. Thanks for your insights and recommendations to keep our roads safe. Regardless of where, and when, and what people are driving, really everyone, as you mentioned, everyone on the road has a part to do to keep the road safe.

And driving is a privilege. I really like that statement. Driving is a privilege. We can't forget that. Just imagine if we lose that privilege and how it changes our lives. The tragedies that occur are horrible with those who continue to move forward, and not having that privilege is difficult. And that's the thing that maybe we have to really instill in the young drivers, and other drivers, is that it is a privilege. So thanks for that.

Thank you for listening. I'm Enzo Garritano. On behalf of Michelle Roberts, I want to thank OPP Sergeant Kerry Schmidt for joining us on this third and final episode on driving safety and road safety.

Don't forget to like and subscribe so you don't miss any future upcoming episodes. Thank you.

Announcer:

The *IHSA Safety Podcast*. For more episodes, tips, and all things safety, go to ihsasafetypodcast.ca. Thanks for listening.