

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Stop texting/emailing and driving

By Stephen Somerville

I was in my car the other day driving southbound on Highway 400 when out of the blue, appearing in my rearview mirror very quickly, was a Porsche. The driver must have been doing at least 150 km/hour.

I quickly moved out of the lane and watched him fly by.

It got me to thinking about that time in April when the police apprehended a dozen vehicles, including a Lamborghini, and a Porsche for speeding, among a number of infractions.

This then lead me to thinking about the other dumb things that people do in cars; driving while under the influence or texting/emailing while operating their vehicle.

The point is that all three behaviors have the potential to result in multiple fatalities.

As a public service announcement I am reprinting (with a small update) my article from last summer regarding distracted driving. If this saves one life, then it is it.

Please stop texting and driving.

When I am in my car waiting for the street light to turn green at intersections around this province I am continually amazed by the amount of people who are sending texts or checking e-mails on their hand held devices.

You need to stop it or if the urge to look at that incoming e-mail/text message is so overwhelming, then just put the device in your glove compartment.

Various media reports have shown uniformed police personnel riding VIVA buses in York Region and calling their partners to issue tickets to those who are texting while driving.

I think this is a great idea.

We have to remind our family members and our friends that we should not and cannot text while driving.

This is one of those things that even if you text only once, it can potentially lead to life changing events for a number of people.

I will admit that in the past that I have sent texts while driving but no longer.

Two things scared me straight.

First, during the July 1 long weekend my family and I were driving back from London along Highway 401.

We were in the middle lane, driving behind a large tractor trailer that was continually swerving between that lane and the left (fast) lane. This tractor trailer just missed swiping a car in the passing lane. I was not sure if the driver had been drinking. I drove up beside the truck and got a look at the driver. He was driving with one hand and texting with the other, all while speeding along at about 130 km /hour.

I shook my head in disbelief and hoped that his activity would not lead to a catastrophe.

The other reason for not checking text messages while driving in the car is because of a commercial. If any of you have been to a recent movie at the local Cineplex you might have seen it.

It shows a person driving a car. He is texting, gets distracted for an instant and his car is rammed from the side. You see the air bag deploying. The next scene has the driver of the car waking up. The camera slowly pans back to reveal the driver sitting in a wheelchair in a room with his care giver.

Just the thought of the commercial sends shivers down my spine. I don't want to be that guy and I definitely don't want to be the person that causes this to happen to someone else.

As I thought about it some more, the commercial brought back another vivid memory of the deadly results that can occur from texting while driving.

A couple of years back I used to drive the two hours and twenty minutes or so to Nanticoke (past Hamilton, on Lake Erie) as I was developing a large combined cycle natural gas generation facility.

I had negotiated with a farmer to use part of his land for our companies' energy project. We were driving to lunch one day when the gentleman farmer showed me the intersection where a car driven by a young man had collided with a car driven by a fellow student. The driver was texting and went through a two way stop sign at about 120 km per hour and killed the other person instantly. I was shown where the two cars had eventually come to a stop; it was horrible.

The deceased was the son of the farmer's friend and the accident took place only about 1km from the friend's home.

Thinking about this again the other day shook me up.

I admit that in the past I have occasionally taken and made text/e-mail messages while driving in my car. I almost got into an accident once because of it, which did scare me quite a bit.

The movie commercial made me stop altogether. I will take or make the occasional call with the voice-only device in my car but I do not check or make any texts while I am driving in the car. I will only check the messages when I am at my destination and I have parked my vehicle.

Please make a similar pledge to yourself to stop texting while driving.

Your pledge will save lives.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com