

December 23, 2012

Double Fatality on Vanneck Road But No Explanation For Volvo Loss-Of-Control

No sooner had we discussed the issue of "The" road conditions in our news item a couple of days ago that we experience a double fatality in the London area with the exact official pronouncement that we warned about. It is reported that earlier this afternoon a northbound Volvo went out of control on Vanneck Road north of McEwan Drive, northwest of London, Ontario, and slid into the path of a southbound Ford Escape SUV. Two occupants of the Volvo and a dog were all killed. It was clear from the direct contact damage to the left side of the Volvo that it was sliding sideways when it collided with the front end of the Ford Escape. This orientation is fairly common in fatal loss-of-control collisions except that it would normally be the right side, not the left side, of the Volvo that should have sustained the direct impact. Unfortunately we do not have an opportunity to examine why this occurred nor will we be able to examine the accident site while the evidence might be fresh. So it is left in the hands of the investigating police to document and explain what happened.

In a London Free Press article investigating police were quoted as saying that weather was a factor in the crash as the "...roads were wet and slushy on the shoulders at the time". OPP Constable Kevin Howe was quoted as reminding drivers "People have to change their driving habits to meet with the weather conditions...when weather changes, people still drive the same way".

But no mention was made of the fact that, in the background of the photograph showing the vehicles at their final rest positions there was the evidence of the end of a guardrail which clearly identified the location of the crash in a "sag" of the road at a narrow bridge. A simple review of the site via Google Maps shows the extent of the sag in the road. The same photo also showed bare pavement in the middle of the road while there was a substantial amount of snow along about a metre or so inboard of the white painted edge line of the lane.

In our opinion Constable Howe was quick to suggest that the driver of the Volvo was not driving properly in response to the road conditions. We question whether the Constable had sufficient information and evidence to determine whether the driver of the Volvo was provided with a consistent quality of road surface condition or whether that condition changed at a location where he could not detect that change in time to prevent the loss of control. The conditions of the road surface at the time of the crash are rarely discussed or revealed. The bias in the report is evident as the blame for the crash is being placed on the weather conditions rather than on the roadway conditions. It should be obvious that road conditions are not only under the control of the weather but they are also under the control of maintenance personnel. So before concluding that it was just a case of unavoidably poor weather the police should have evaluated whether proper maintenance actions were taken.

December 21, 2012

Driving For "The" Road Conditions



What Is "The" Road Condition?

We see and read various advisements that warn drivers to be alert and drive according to "the" road conditions. While such comments make for good propaganda, we warn drivers not to be fooled into the belief that there is such a thing as "the" road condition. If we could assume that a roadway has not been artificially treated by plowing, salt and sand then the roadway may be closer to a uniform state. However the actions of maintenance personnel cannot produce a uniform treatment thus causing its own dangers. Plowing operations are not perfect. Sand and salt are not placed uniformly on

the width or length of a road. The result is that in some instances a driver's expectations are violated with deadly results.



The belief that road conditions are consistent and will remain consistent is dangerous. One of the largest problems in winter driving (that is not officially recognized) is that drivers have difficulty differentiating between very different road conditions that may appear to be similar. There is no immediate cure for this problem. We advise that, regardless of what you believe, always assume the worse whenever the roadway is not bare and dry, and slow down. This is not a cure but it will reduce a large percentage of incidents that could lead to a crash.

December 20, 2012

"Because I Say So" - A Reminder of What Should Not Exist in Any Justice System

While we reach the end of the year we feel it important to focus on a regrettable circumstance that exists in our justice system high-lighted by a number of high-profile wrongful, murder convictions such as those of Guy Paul Morin, David Milgaard and Donald Marshall. Although the realm of motor vehicles collisions does not reach the same level of public interest, persons involved in these tragedies suffer similar

circumstances, although not as severe, when their cases are improperly adjudicated. We have prepared a detailed article on this issue on the Articles page of this website. We encourage your comment and active involvement to reduce the chance that these miscarriages of justice repeat themselves in the future.

December 19, 2012

Transport Truck Collisions On Highway 401 Near Chatham Need Further Investigation

The fact that one fatal collision was related to a potential second one is an issue that needs further investigation. Yesterday, December 18, 2012, at approximately 0122 hours an eastbound tractor-trailer passed through the narrow median of Highway 401 and rolled over in the north ditch, resulting in fatal injuries to its driver, a 56-year-old man from Lockport, New York.

As traffic was backed up as a result of the police investigation, a second collision occurred at approximately 0930 hours in the westbound lanes of the highway as a westbound transport truck drove into the rear of the trailer of another. The severity of that crash resulting in critical injuries to one of the two occupants of that rear-ending truck.

While police are quick to blame the driver of the rear-ending truck for failing to observe the stopped traffic ahead one also has to consider what additional actions could have been taken to warn drivers of the danger of stopped traffic. At 100 km/h a loaded tractor-trailer could require at least 100 metres of aggressive braking in order to bring such rig to a halt. In many instances a driver does not expect stopped traffic on such a highway and it could take a longer time for the driver to detect that such aggressive braking is essential. Thus a time of two seconds to perceive the necessity to brake, followed by an initial lower level of braking effort, could increase that stopping distance to well over 150 metres. At such distances it is not easy to distinguish between slowing traffic and stopped traffic and this intensifies the problem.

There is little or no information gathered to determine how often collisions occur in the midst of stopped traffic from a police investigation or from matters such as road construction. Yet in our experience this is a common and dangerous happening.

December 16, 2012

A Thought Toward All Those Affected by the Shooting Deaths in Connecticut School Shooting

While we refrain from discussion of topics unrelated to motor vehicle accident investigation and reconstruction, there are times when we must make a brief exception.

Such is the case as we are all deeply disturbed by the tragic deaths of the teachers and students who were gunned down in their Newtown, Connecticut school.

Every life is precious but it is just that much more disturbing when the deaths involve so many young and innocent children. There is nothing we could say or write that has not already been expressed. We simply want to add that we feel greatly sorry for all the parents and family members, first responders and everyone else who must live with this exceptional horror and that we hope that time may ease their tremendous grief.

Beverly Bearinger Identified As Driver Fatally Injured in Collision with Transport Truck Near Elmira, Ontario

While we grieve the many deaths of those in Newtown, Connecticut, it is also as tragic to the family and all who knew Beverly Bearinger, the 17-year-old driver of a 2002 Nissan who passed away as a result of a collision with a transport truck near Elmira, Ontario, on Friday, December 14, 2012 at approximately 1914 hours. The only available information about the crash is that the Nissan "pulled out in front of the truck just before it was hit". This could mean many things and we will not comment if no further information is available.

December 15, 2012

Lamp Standard Falls Onto Parked Car In Downtown London, Ontario, With No Apparent Reason Or Official Concern

The manner in which the incident was reported would suggest that no one cares how or why a nine metre tall lamp standard simply fell over onto the roof of a parked van in Downtown London, Ontario this afternoon. An article by Dale Carruthers of the London Free Press reported that the pole fell spontaneously without any impact, onto a vehicle that was in the process of being parked along the curb of Richmond Street near Mill street.

Constable Anthea Fordyce was quoted in the article as saying "He was just going to back up and boom, down it came". But nothing was mentioned about what the police were going to do about it, only that "A city crew spend (sic) nearly two hours cleaning up the scene".

Our question is this, what if someone with a knife or gun had used the weapon without success as the knife or bullet just grazed by some intended victim's body? What would be the police response? Similarly, what if a bomb blew up in the van but no one was injured? What would be the police response? Clearly a photograph in the London Free Press article showed that the fallen pole landed right on top of the driver's seat of the van and crushed the roof. If the driver had been in the vehicle (and maybe the driver was inside although that was not made clear) there was a real possibility that a serious

injury could have occurred, or worse. But because there was no injury is the public just supposed to walk away and forget about it?

This is the kind of issue that we have brought forward on a number of occasions in articles and news items on this website. When roadway maintenance failures occur there is rarely an official response, even though serious injuries and death are sometimes the result. These failures are often glanced over in motor vehicle accidents because other factors such as speed, alcohol and driver inattention are also present. While there is very good reason to focus the public's attention on these three factors there is also good reason to report any incidents of road maintenance failures so their influence can also be dealt with.

If the present lamp standard simply fell over as reported, what does that say about the quality of inspection taking place to insure that the public is protected from these failures? Does any inspection take place? Does anyone know whether inspection takes place. What kind of inspection takes place, and how often? These are the types of questions that the official news media are failing to investigate.

December 13, 2012

Fatal Rollover on Telfer Sideroad in Sarnia Ontario

The local Sarnia newspaper is reporting that a single vehicle rollover has occurred on Telfer Sideroad between Confederation and London Lines on the eastern outskirts of Sarnia. This north-south roadway contains housing in the north toward London Line and a rural-type setting as one proceeds further south toward Confederation Line. Throughout its length is an aged, tar and chip surface with alligator cracking along its edges. Such conditions are not ideal and it will need to be seen if this was a factor in the crash. No further information has been released at this time (0750 hours, December 13th) as police will likely have the roadway closed for several hours this morning.

December 12, 2012

30-Year-Old Jessica Hamill of Erin, Ontario Reportedly Killed In Single Vehicle Collision

It is reported that Jessica Hamill, 30, of Erin, Ontario was the driver of a Honda Civic that left Wellington County Road 50, shortly after midnight today, Wednesday, December 12th, and sustained fatal injuries a impacting trees and rolling over. The collision site is just west of County Road 125 between Erin and Rockwood, Ontario.

December 10, 2012

Tilbury Man, Brian Sheffield, Killed When Van Rear-Ends Truck on Highway 401 Near Dutton

There was little explanation provided as to why Brian Sheffield's Van drove into the back of an eastbound tractor-trailer on Highway 401 near Dutton, Ontario on Friday, December 7, 2012. Certainly the early morning of about 0630 hours would have provided a night-time scenario. Police also stated that the tractor-trailer was in motion at the time of the crash, but what does that really mean? Was the truck travelling 100 km/h or 5 km/h? That is an important issue.

Slippery Roads - First of the Season - Was the Response Appropriate?

In the last several days many localities experienced slippery road conditions in Southern Ontario for the first time this season and the age-old problems of travelling too quickly and failure to treat roads properly revealed themselves. The Toronto Star Newspaper quoted York Regional Police Inspector Angelo De Lorenzi as saying the road conditions were "treacherous" and he urged the public not to drive. However the question was never asked: Were the roads treated properly, at the appropriate time and with the proper mixture? It is as if these conditions are inevitable and road maintenance personnel have no input into the conditions. While weather events may be challenging it is also our responsibility to make sure that those challenges are met properly and the actions of those responsible for these important actions are available to be observed openly by the public.

December 6, 2012

Clarification: We Do Not Comment On Cases Where We Have Been Retained

As a point of clarification, some visitors to our site may wonder why we remain silent, or become silent regarding certain motor vehicle accidents in our area while providing details accounts and updates on others. Sometimes it is because we are too busy with our regular activities of providing expert opinion to our clients. At other times, we may have been retained by one side or another and therefore it is required that we maintain our findings confidential.

Otherwise, we will continue to do our utmost to provide fair and unbiased observations and analyses about traffic accidents where we believe they might be educational or of general benefit to understanding how these events occurred. We caution however that, not being part of any official investigation, our comments on this website are often based on limited assess to information, often limited to examinations of collision sites that we conduct ourselves and photographs that are made available through standard news agencies. Having been involved in a large number of official investigations in the past 32 years we are able to rely on this previous experience to suggest what the totality of evidence might indicate even though we have not actually been able to examine it.

December 5, 2012

Reported Collision Events Questionable in Man's Ejection From Jeep During Police Pursuit on Highway 19, South of Ingersoll, Ontario

We seem to be dealing with a series of questionable reports of how collisions have occurred recently. The most recent involves a man who stole a Jeep and was fleeing police yesterday, December 4th, when he attempted to "swerve" around a spike belt on Highway 19 and struck a parked transport truck. It was reported that the Jeep rolled over and the man was ejected. He then got up and tried to flee on foot but was captured.

Photos shown by various newspaper articles show the Jeep lying on its driver's side with definite damage to the left front end indicating that the Jeep struck something with the left portion of its front end before the rollover occurred. The cab of a transport truck is shown parked in the background and it would make sense that this was the parked vehicle that was struck. The unusual fact is that a police cruiser is shown stopped against the underside of the Jeep (remember the Jeep is lying on its left side) with its hood up and evidence of debris around it. The Woodstock Sentinel-Review newspaper article indicated that, following the initial impact the Jeep was then "knocked into the police cruiser". Well, that is not quite the way this occurred.

Evidently the Jeep Cherokee was northbound and struck the truck which was parked on the west side of Highway 19. That portion of the report is believable. The narrow frontal impact to the Jeep would have caused its counter-clockwise rotation and, along with its higher centre-of-gravity, would have contributed to its rollover onto its driver's side. That too is believable.

However the report of the man's ejection is questionable. Lying on its driver's side the vehicle presents no avenue of ejection. The windshield is intact. The right side windows are intact. The only opening is of the rear tailgate. In a frontal impact like this the vehicle stopped beneath the occupant's body while the occupant continues in the original direction until he collides with the vehicle interior. This is simply an application of Newton's First Law but is also observable in real-life collisions. Certainly, the Jeep driver could have escaped through that open tailgate but he would not have been "ejected" in the general meaning of that word in the realm of collisions. Certainly, with very high rates of rotation, drivers have been known to be ejected in intersection collisions when they ramp up a collapsed seatback and sail into the back seat area, but the possibility of such an occurrence in this frontal impact is doubtful.

Furthermore, the Jeep could not have been deflected into the cruiser if the cruiser is behind the Jeep. What had to happen is that the cruiser had to be driving forward and failed to stop in time to avoid striking the Jeep. Whether there was an additional contact with the right side of the Jeep and the left side of the cruiser just prior to rollover is not certain but photos of the undamaged right side of the Jeep suggest that this did not occur. So the cruiser had to be in very close proximity to the Jeep when the truck impact

occurred in order for the driver of the cruiser to be unable to stop in time to avoid striking the Jeep. That leads to other questions. If the Jeep collided because it was avoiding the spike belt, how did the cruiser get around the same spike belt if it was travelling at a similar speed and was very close to the Jeep?

It is not our point to question the tactics of police when they are trying to apprehend a criminal. Sometimes things need to be done quickly and running criminals often do not get apprehended easily. But we would just like to see the facts reported as they actually occurred.

December 4, 2012

Explanation of St Catharines Man's Traffic Death Insufficient

We appreciate that all the details of a traffic death cannot be provided in a news story. But on occasion the reported information is wrong or the conclusions reached in an official investigation are wrong. It is for this reason that we try to raise a red flag when something that is being reported does not match common expectation, even though there might be a reasonable explanation for the uncommon happening that has not been reported.

This appears to be true in the reporting of the death of an 87-year-old male in St Catharines, Ontario who was reportedly involved in a 3-vehicle collision in that City on Friday, November 30th, 2012. The local St Catharines Standard newspaper began reporting yesterday that the unidentified man has succumbed to his injuries.

The official story was that the man was westbound on Scott Street in his Cadillac when he lost control of his vehicle, "crossed a red light into the intersection" and the Cadillac struck a Pontiac Sunfire making a left turn onto Scott Street. The Cadillac was then "suddenly" reversed and collided with a GMC Acadia stopped at the red light on Scott Street. While further explanation might clarify matters, this description does not contain a sequence of motions that would be expected to occur.

Two photos accompanying the St Catharines Standard article show the Cadillac and Sunfire and they also show a partially hidden vehicle in the background that would have similar features to that of a GMC Acadia. Although it is known that news photographers will purposely take photos that hide the extent of damage to vehicles, the portions of the vehicles that are in view do not indicate that there was a large change-in-velocity in any of the impacts. It is interesting how a photograph of the left side of the Cadillac would appear to be purposely taken with a rescue worker conveniently walking between the camera and the driver's door of the Cadillac so that no one would be able to evaluate what damage was done in the area of the deceased driver's seated area. It is this kind of attempt to prevent evidence from being evaluated that does not help the situation.

Furthermore, the article indicated that police would not release the identity of the driver "out of respect for his family's privacy". We understand the difficulties faced by families in these circumstances. But the same could be said for any important news event where a fatality has occurred. At what point do we stop reporting the identity of persons who have been killed? There are important reasons in a free society for the public to be made aware of facts that are occurring around them and to be able to evaluate the accuracy of what is being reported to them.

The elderly, much like children, are vulnerable and need our vigilant protection. Not fitting the norm, the characteristics of this segment of our population make them more susceptible to uncommon injuries because vehicles and the roadway environment do not take into account their special needs. It is for this reason that we need to be careful to properly evaluate incidents where injuries have occurred so that we can be aware and make adjustments to protect these groups where possible.

December 2, 2012

Mom & Tot Fatality In Caledonia - Did SUV on Highway 6 Slip on Icy Surface?

While official news media are making their usual pitch that police are rounding up the usual suspects, we ask a simple question regarding why a Chevrolet SUV travelled into the path of of a transport truck and killed a young mother and her 3-year-old son on Friday, November 30th, 2012 just south of Hamilton, Ontario Canada: Did the SUV on Highway 6 slip on an icy surface? While it would appear that the question could be easily answered it is revealing how difficult it is to get that simple answer and it is revealing how no one would seemingly think to ask that question.

We can remind readers that temperatures in the area were hovering around a maximum slightly below the freezing mark and the collision occurred on the bridge spanning the Grand River. Yet it would seem that everyone has conveniently forgotten that the surface of a bridge freezes up more easily than a road surface planted on solid earth.

The Brantford Expositor newspaper quoted Const. Mark Foster with the Haldimand County OPP as saying: "At this time...Everything is being considered as possible contributing factors". But the question whether the road surface was slippery seemed to have not been asked. We congratulate all news media involved on their diligence in keeping the public informed.