

Peel Regional Police Officer Fatally Injured In Crash On March 1st, 2010

We are making it a habit to comment on Police fatal collisions lately. It has been reported this morning that a Peel Regional Police officer died of his injuries following a collision "in the Airport Road and Steeles Avenue area...". The marked cruiser was reportedly involved in a collision with another vehicle before its right side slammed into a light standard.

The accompanying photograph shows a cruiser with its right side pressed against a standard. The crush on the vehicle's right side is very severe indicating a high speed upon approach to the impact with the standard. Since the officer should have been located on the opposite side to the struck surface the issue of seat belt use comes to mind as many officers do not use seat belts as a consequence of their having to get in and out of their cruisers. But since the officer was most likely travelling very quickly, and most likely above the posted speed for an urban roadway, the wearing of a seat belt should have been required.

Next, I notice that the light standard has not sheared off at its base. This is not good. Lamp standards in the area of larger arterial roadways where there is expected to be a lot of traffic and a higher level of service for the road should require breakaway standards. The fact that this standard did not breakaway should be an issue that investigating police should be pursuing. There should never be this much intrusion into the occupant space without the shearing of the standard's base.

Next, the question arises: Why was the officer involved in an initial minor impact with another vehicle before this occurred? Was he involved in an emergency action that led to his high speed? If he was travelling much faster than the speed limit then he should have had his roof lights and siren activated. As I have said many times now, just because you drive a police cruiser does not make you invincible, or better in reacting to events than any other driver. And the same goes for the drivers who encounter a speeding cruiser, they also cannot react any better than they can for anything else. The speed of the cruiser also suggests that it was involved in a collision with another vehicle precisely because the cruiser was travelling faster than expected by the other driver. This is what commonly occurs. It also occurs whenever any vehicle is travelling much faster than anyone expects. People are not accustomed to reacting to vehicles that are travelling much faster than expected. So we await further details as to how this event unfolded.

Update: March 3, 2010 0915 Hours

Chief Mike Metcalf of Peel Regional Police just concluded a short news conference in which he identified the deceased officer: Artem "James" Otachakovski. Chief Metcalf indicated Constable Otachakovski started a shift at 1800 hours on March 1st and at about 2300 hours on his way to "assist another officer" in a non-emergency situation.

Chief Metcalf was asked about the speed of the cruiser and Metcalf commented that he did not have any information about that because investigators were having problems removing the event data recorder of the Chrysler product. This is not unusual given the extent of crush on the vehicle's right side.

Video taken at the site showed that light standard that the cruiser struck contained a pedestrian crossing signal so we know that this collision occurred in the area of an intersection. The video also showed the other vehicle which exhibited damage to its front end and there was an air bag deployment visible in that other vehicle. The newer age of the other vehicle suggests that it also might have a downloadable event data recorder thus there should be speed data and other particulars available from both vehicles.

The question still persists: why was the cruiser travelling at such high speed in a non-emergency situation? Chief Metcalf indicates he cannot comment further because the investigation is continuing. But very often these details are left untold and it is an important matter. There are important issues regarding police involvement in many fatal and serious injury collisions. Some of those may be unavoidable due to the nature of police duties. But some may not be unavoidable. This issue has to see the light of public scrutiny rather than being left unreported. From the several collisions I have examined lately there is a pressing need to evaluate how police are trained in their driving activities because there are several questionable collisions that I have seen where officers have not acted in a safe manner and a collision could have been avoided with proper, defensive driver training and direction from police administrations.