

# Citizen Control of the Citizen's Business

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## Motoring Safety

Story No. 4

It must have become evident to most readers that even the so-called Safety Responsibility Law, while probably the most practical and satisfactory type of motor accident compensatory legislation and a valuable adjunct of a government's continuous programme for accident prevention, does not of itself reach the heart of the problem, viz., the elimination of motor accidents so far as is humanly possible, and the consequent reduction to their lowest terms of injury, death, the creation of financially dependent homes and individuals and the destruction of property, all of which up to now have been apparently inseparable from motor traffic. The modern motor car exists for the service of humanity, not vice versa. Any society which claims to be civilized must, therefore, solve the problem of how to control motor traffic so as to obtain from it the greatest human service while reducing the human toll to an ever receding minimum.

Legislation will help if it is translated into administrative action and exists not only on the Statute Books but in the hearts and minds of

Car owners  
Car drivers  
Pedestrians



## What Legislation Will Help Directly in the Prevention of Motor Accidents?

In general, it may be said that only that legislation will help which deals with the actual causes of motor accidents. The main causes may be listed as follows:

1. Carelessness\* of drivers as manifested in—
  - (a) Looking out of back of car while driving ahead.
  - (b) Proceeding to turn out from curb, to back up, or pass a crossing without first "looking and listening".
  - (c) Passing other cars on curves or on hills.
2. Recklessness of drivers, as shown in—
  - (a) Driving at excessive speed.
  - (b) "Cutting in" in traffic.
  - (c) Not slowing down at intersections.
  - (d) Trying to "beat" trains to crossings.
  - (e) Being under the influence of liquor while driving.
3. Incompetence of drivers, as shown in—
  - (a) Lack of familiarity with their machines.
  - (b) Ignorance of motor laws and rules of the road.
4. Physical incompetence of drivers, as shown, for example, by—
  - (a) Blindness of one eye, extremely defective vision even when supplied with glasses, color blindness.
  - (b) Deafness.
  - (c) Defective or weak heart.
  - (d) Epilepsy.
  - (e) Liability to fainting.
  - (f) Loss or crippling of a limb or limbs.
  - (g) Physical debility.
  - (h) Nervous defects, such as undue excitability and slowness of reaction time.
5. Carelessness of pedestrians.
6. Machines defective for various causes, such as—
  - (a) Defective brakes.
  - (b) Defective steering gear.
  - (c) Tires so worn as to be very liable to blow out.
7. Level crossings.
8. Narrow roadways.
9. Poor road surfaces.
10. Sharp corners and short turns.
11. Obstruction of the view.
12. Lack of warning signs.
13. Defective lights.
14. Overcrowding of cars, particularly of front seats.

It is not claimed that this list of causes is complete or that they are listed in the order of importance. The list simply provides a point of departure for discussion. The Bureau will welcome suggestions as to important additions to the list.

### Means Taken or Suggested in Various Quarters to Deal With These Causes.

The Bureau does not offer these as its own proposals. It offers them as topics for discussion and criticism. It is evident that in a society which contains such a large proportion of car owners and drivers, the passage of effective laws regulating the use of motor cars is difficult unless the judgment of the motoring public is carried as to the necessity for the legislation. The Bureau is convinced that a consideration of the awful facts and a full and free discussion of ways and means will in the end produce the necessary public opinion among drivers and pedestrians. In any event in a democratic country this is the only available method of approach.

\* Carelessness and recklessness are very hard to distinguish and one merges with the other as precautions become more obviously necessary.

### 1. Carelessness of Drivers.

A law defining carelessness and empowering the authorities to suspend a driver's license after one proved case of carelessness involving danger to the public, whether or not resulting in damage or injury, and to further suspend or revoke for proved second or third offences.

### 2. Recklessness of Drivers.

A law requiring suspension of driver's license for a year on first conviction for recklessness\* as may be defined in the law\*\*, whether or not damage or injury has resulted, a longer suspension with imprisonment or fine on a second conviction and a permanent revocation of license on a third conviction. A provision that conviction for driving under the influence of liquor to be followed by immediate revocation of license, with or without fine and imprisonment, reinstatement being made possible but extremely difficult.

### 3. Incompetence of Drivers.

A law compelling all operators of cars to pass an examination on skill in driving, knowledge of the law and rules of the road. This is usual for all professional drivers and is becoming usual for all drivers. Such a law is not always made to apply to those who were already driving at the time the law was passed, the presumption being that anyone who has driven without serious accident for years has already passed the most practical test possible, and the extreme difficulty of examining tens of thousands within a short period being obvious. Statistics, however, in one state show that in 1928 over 43% of the drivers involved in motor accidents had six or more years' experience as motor vehicle operators. It has been suggested that re-examination at the end of certain periods would take care of this difficulty. This does not necessarily mean that such drivers are incompetent. Statistics are said to show the majority of accidents happen to competent drivers.

### 4. Physical Incompetence of Drivers.

A law compelling a physical examination of drivers and absolutely refusing a driver's license to all who are handicapped by incomplete vision, poor vision that may not be corrected by glasses, color blindness, deafness, weak heart, serious nervous instability, slow reaction time, epilepsy, loss or crippling of a limb or limbs, and any other physical handicap to safe driving†. Another suggestion is that applicants for driving licenses should be required to sign a statement of their physical fitness and that, if later the statement should be proved untrue, the signer should be liable to grave penalties. (Some hold that this provision should be confined to those driving for hire.)

### 5. Carelessness of Pedestrians.

The enforcement of a requirement that pedestrians observe all traffic and other signals in the same way as motor cars. At busy intersections the construction of subways for use of pedestrians. The use of the police force in the education of pedestrians. The training of children in the schools to use safety precautions when crossing city streets.

### 6. Defective Machines.

A law requiring the inspection of machines, used or unused, when they pass into the possession of a new owner or driver, and a periodical inspection of all cars in service by inspectors licensed by a government department, but at the expense of the owner. It is claimed by some that statistics prove that only a small percentage of the total number of motor accidents is due to mechanical defects.

### 7. Level Crossings.

A law requiring the abolition of level crossings covering a term of years, and in the meantime the establishment of bell and light signals and, where traffic is heaviest, a separation of heavy from light traffic, and

\* It is felt by many that speed alone should not be regarded as a proof of recklessness.

\*\* A provision of the Ontario law since 1923.

† On the other hand some drivers with one eye or minus a limb have, it is claimed, proved to be competent and safe drivers.



slow from fast traffic, by the establishment of separate highways or highway zones.

Some believe that this would be financially impossible and suggest in lieu thereof that the Dominion Government increase its annual grant to the road crossing fund from \$200,000 to \$1,000,000.

**8. Narrow Roadways.**

A highway act establishing over a term of years the highest possible minimum of width for the various grades of roads, according to density of traffic, a provision of the law requiring the construction of paths and sidewalks for pedestrians along all heavily travelled roads and a further provision for a white line in the middle of every paved highway throughout its length and not simply at the curves.

**9. Poor Road Surfaces.**

A highway act establishing over a term of years grades of construction for all roadways according to the amount of traffic, and providing that all roadways shall be of safe construction from the centre to the shoulders.

**10. Sharp Corners and Short Turns.**

A highway act establishing a time limit for the rounding of all sharp corners and the elimination of short turns on all highways for general traffic.

**11. Obstruction of the View.**

A highway act establishing a time limit for the removal of all obstructions to the view of motorists.

**12. Lack of Warning Signs.**

A highway act providing for the provision of signs at all possible danger points on all roadways of general traffic according to a uniform method of "signing".

**13. Defective Lights.**

Enforcement of the law with regard to glaring lights. The inclusion of the inspection of the focussing of lights in the periodic general inspection. A provision that extra light bulbs be included in each car's equipment. The increase of the penalties against driving with glaring headlights, with only one headlight, or without lights. The forbidding of dimming of lights when travelling on the highway.

**14. Strict enforcement of the law limiting the number of passengers in the front seat according to the width of the seat, and limiting the total number of passengers according to the capacity of the car.**

None of these or any other proposed measures can have any appreciable effect unless the administration of the laws is made as efficient as the laws are drastic. Laws, unless enforced, act as narcotics rather than stimulants.

**The effectiveness of the laws depends on:**

- (a) The efficiency of the administrative machinery set up to enforce the laws;
- (b) The degree of support that the enforcement of the law receives from the driving and pedestrian public.

This bulletin is not written solely from the standpoint of Ontario, as cars from other provinces and countries use our streets and as Toronto cars travel outside Ontario. No province is safe until all provinces and countries whose citizens use our streets and highways for motor transportation have adopted proper standards and trained their citizens to observe them.

The Bureau welcomes from its members or the general public any further suggestions on highway safety. Particularly suggestions would be welcome as to how mental and moral tests might be applied so as to remove from the highway those whose mental makeup and non-moral or anti-social outlook render them a dangerous hazard entirely apart from their skill as operators.