

Alberta documentary exposes reckless driving epidemic

Alberta is suffering though an epidemic and the Alberta Medical Association has taken steps to help eradicate it.

Through the Health Issues Council, the association is a participating partner in an Alberta-produced documentary about aggressive and reckless driving.



Sudden Stop is airing nationally on broadcast television and the producers will be donating DVDs to Alberta schools and libraries in mid-2007. In addition, a limited number of DVDs are available to doctors who may be involved in local advocacy work.

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Shot on location in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, *Sudden Stop* is intended to encourage drivers of all ages to consider and discuss the dangers of careless driving. The documentary tackles a wide range of risks including cell phone use, driving under the influence, driving when fatigued, speeding and much more.

How big is this epidemic in Alberta? Almost 400 people die and 30,000 are

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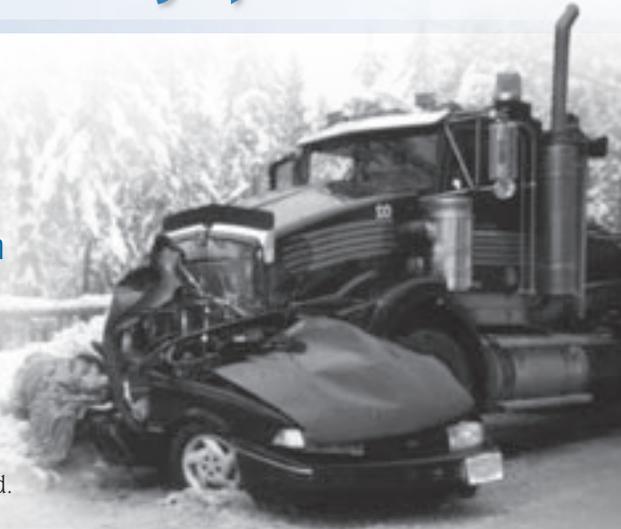
"This takes a terrible toll not only on victims, but destroys families and relationships while costing the health care system billions of dollars," says Edmonton-area producer/director Marvin Polis.

Like the influential American documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, by Michael Moore, *Sudden Stop* began as a personal critique by Polis.

"On average, I've been affected by a car crash every 2.5 to three years and a close family member was recently involved in a very serious crash," says Polis. "I just said enough is enough. Real people need to start telling real stories to counteract the fast and furious fiction of Hollywood."

A drunk driver from Calgary killed his best friend. A young mother from Red Deer lost her husband and child in a car crash; her other two children suffered permanent brain injuries. A young mother from Hythe, Alberta, is widowed after cell phone use. A young man spent eight days crushed in a car wreck with no food or water. These are just some of the stories *Sudden Stop* tells.

In addition to these candid and heart-breaking interviews with



Photos from *Sudden Stop*

victims, *Sudden Stop* shadows law enforcement and emergency crews with unprecedented access to crash scenes. Polis also takes a hidden camera on the road to capture the behaviors of Alberta's drivers. Alarming behaviors are captured at stop signs, in school zones, construction zones, crosswalks, Edmonton's infamous Whitemud Drive and Calgary's Deerfoot Trail.

Although *Sudden Stop* does not reveal the identities of the drivers, "I wonder if people would drive like that if they knew their friends and neighbors were watching them," muses Polis. "We seem to drive like we are anonymous."

Two Alberta doctors participate in the documentary. Outspoken injury prevention advocate Dr. Louis H. Francescutti, Emergency Medicine, Edmonton, is particularly direct in drawing attention to the problem.

"The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared traffic injuries a worldwide health epidemic," says Francescutti. "So the WHO looked at the world and said we have a problem. And you know what? This problem is going to get worse." ▶



“After watching *Sudden Stop*, for the first time in my life I’m wearing my seatbelt. And now I realize I’ve been a bad influence on my children.”

(A British Columbia truck driver)

“One of the best documentaries I’ve seen on the subject.”

(An Alberta doctor)

► “There’s a whole culture of risk-taking, speed, fast. The movies show it all the time. Every movie has a car-chase scene where someone crashes the car, gets up, walks away, kisses the girl and lives happily ever after. So we’ve raised a generation of idiots who think you can crash a car and walk away.”

Dr. Warren S. Thirsk, Emergency Medicine, Edmonton, goes on to say, “Three thousand pounds of metal can hurt you very badly. I think one of the things people expect the medical world to do is to fix problems.

“People expect me to wave a magic wand and fix everything and the truth is I can’t.

Brain injuries never heal. Death never heals.

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“I refer to it as the Humpty Dumpty syndrome. Can I glue a piece of the shell back together? Possibly. But is it still cracked? Yes. People expect me to wave a magic wand and fix everything and the truth is I can’t. Brain injuries never heal. Death never heals. Dead is dead. I can’t bring anyone back and that’s what people forget.”

The list of supporters for the *Sudden Stop* documentary grew rapidly over the three years the project was in production.

In addition to the Alberta Medical Association, more than 20 organizations helped out, including the Alberta Motor Association, Capital Health, Edmonton Police Service, RCMP, STARS Air Ambulance, Edmonton EMS, CTV, CHUM, Alberta Community Initiatives Program, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta Transportation, Alberta Traffic Supply, Royal Alexandra Hospital and many others.

The producers are grateful for the assistance. “I know it sounds cliché but if this project saves one life or prevents one horrific maiming, it will be worth it,” concludes Polis.

Sudden Stop has already aired several times on broadcast television

to rave reviews from Alberta and other parts of Canada.

The documentary will air again numerous times over the next four years on Canadian Learning Television, CourtTV Canada, ACCESS and other broadcasters. Check your TV listings for days and times.

The 96-minute feature length version of *Sudden Stop* is segmented into 10-minute sections on DVD to make the content more “bite-sized” in an educational setting.

Physicians who are involved in advocacy work, and wish to obtain the DVD, should contact Daphne C. Andrychuk, Secretary, Public Affairs, Alberta Medical Association: 780.482.2626, ext. 275, toll-free 1.800.272.9680, ext. 275, daphne.andrychuk@albertadoctors.org. ■

