

THE HONOURABLE JOSEPH HANDLEY
MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION

NO. _____
DATE _____

A BILL TO AMEND THE MOTOR VEHICLES ACT
STRATEGY TO REDUCE IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon I intend to introduce a Bill to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act. The amendments are aimed at strengthening the Motor Vehicles Act as a forceful deterrent to drinking and driving.

Last October I made a statement in this Assembly to report substantial progress over the past decade in reducing the number of alcohol-related traffic accidents and the number of deaths and injuries that result from them. I was pleased to report that real progress. At the same time, it was discouraging to acknowledge that people are still being killed and injured in alcohol-related accidents. These kinds of accidents need not happen at all.

Driving a motor vehicle is a serious undertaking. We need to give it our full attention. The consumption of alcohol impairs our mental judgment and diminishes our physical reflexes. Thankfully, it seems, more and more drivers have come to understand that drinking and driving just don't mix. Still, there are those who have not received the message that society no longer tolerates preventable accidents.

In brief, Mr. Speaker, the amendments I propose will provide for new administrative suspensions of driver's licenses for impaired driving. These are administrative rather than judicial procedures that enforcement officers can invoke immediately and separately from the criminal justice process.

A person driving a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol content of greater than 0.05% would be subject to a 24 hour license suspension and a 30 day suspension for a second offence within a two year period. A person found driving with a blood alcohol content of greater than 0.08% would be subject to a 90 day suspension.

A problem here in the Northwest Territories, as well as in southern Canada, has been with people who continue driving even after their driver's license has been suspended. In these cases, the amendments provide for an immediate 30 day vehicle impoundment.

The amendments also attach new conditions for the reinstatement of a suspended driver's license. The Bill requires that suspended drivers undergo drug and alcohol assessment and, if necessary, complete a rehabilitation program as part of the license reinstatement process.

Finally, the amendments authorize the introduction of a graduated licensing system for new drivers.

Over the past decade, Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories has fallen behind most other jurisdictions in Canada in enacting these or similar measures to deter impaired driving. These amendments will bring our laws in line with those in effect elsewhere in Canada.

In being amongst the last in Canada to bring in these types of impaired driving deterrents, we have had the advantage of studying how they worked in other jurisdictions before introducing them here. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the Bill I will introduce later today is a carefully considered and well written piece of legislation.

I wish these amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act could finally eliminate impaired driving altogether. We can never expect a law to succeed so well in its purpose. However, Mr. Speaker, these amendments will deliver our message. Drinking and driving is dangerous. Drinking and driving is irresponsible. And, in the Northwest Territories, it is unacceptable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.