

Crashes cost area nearly \$1B a year

Study puts dollar figure on traffic deaths, injuries

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The combined cost of all traffic collisions in the Edmonton area was more than \$900 million in 2007, says a study commissioned by the Capital Region Intersection Safety Partnership.

The study looked at all crashes that resulted in death, injury or damage in Edmonton and the surrounding communities of Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc and Devon.

It counted 43 fatal crashes, 8,517 that resulted in injuries and 51,822 involving property damage.

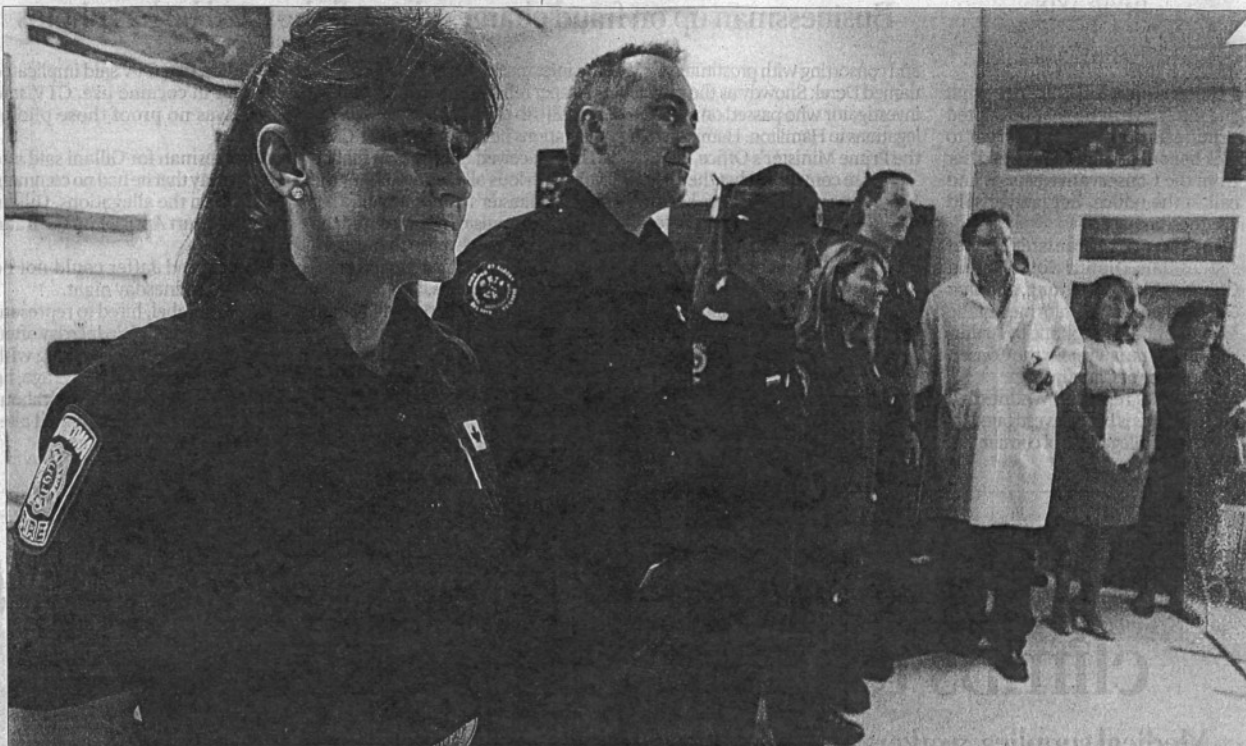
Beyond the cost of lives and livelihoods for those involved in a crash, the partnership says collisions drain money, time and resources from victims and families, as well as emergency responders and medical staff.

"We have known for a long time that collisions carry a hefty price tag," said Gerry Shimko, Edmonton's executive director of traffic safety, who was partnership chairman. "What we didn't know is the cost is nearly \$1 billion a year."

The study tried to tally the financial impact of crashes, looking at the costs to vehicles and property, the costs of emergency services and medical treatment, as well as legal and funeral costs, travel delay and pollution, and even productivity lost at work.

More difficult to measure was the monetary costs of pain, suffering and lost quality of life.

The study attempted to put a dol-



RICK McWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL

When an injury accident occurs, some of the people involved would be, left-right: Sheila Dupuis, communications operator, Jeff Austin emergency services, Acting Sgt. Eric Theuser, Edmonton Police Service; flight nurse Deb Bowers, STARS; Dan Lockwood, AMA roadside assistance; emergency physician Dr. Bill Sevcik, Cassandra DeLuca, Canadian Blood Services; Quentin Ranson (hidden), occupational therapist, Glenrose Hospital; and Susan Adair-Wolf, victim services, Edmonton Police Service.

lar figure on a life, and found that a person would be willing to pay on average \$5.3 million to prevent a crash-related death and \$95,000 to prevent an injury.

Dr. Bill Sevcik sees numerous crash-related injuries come through the University of Alberta Hospital's emergency room. Often, he treats children.

Telling a family someone they loved has died is the hardest part of the job, Sevcik said. "When the

injuries are preventable, delivering that news is even worse."

It makes him angry and makes him wonder why there are so many deaths and injuries when there are speed limits to follow and seatbelts to wear.

Often, the public will hear about the deaths. Big signs that counts traffic fatalities are on display in each Edmonton police station.

Less attention is paid to the many victims who suffer life-altering

injuries.

Occupational therapist Quentin Ranson specializes in head injuries at the Glenrose Hospital. He said 40 to 60 per cent of the head injuries the hospital treats are the result of crashes, and those injuries can change someone's life.

One patient who sticks with Ranson is a mother in her early 20s who developed "locked-in syndrome" after a crash. She is aware of her surroundings but can barely move or

communicate.

She uses a board with the words "yes" and "no" she can tap to answer questions. Beyond that, it is nearly impossible for her to communicate with her child.

"She's now in her mid-20s and she's got a child who's probably five or six years old; and the only way she can interact with her child is through eye contact," Ranson said.

"Hers is a case I can never forget." bgelinas@thejournal.canwest.com