



by Heather Llewellyn

Collision Reporting Centres Set Up Shop in Nova Scotia

The Roadside Responders Association is worried the initiative will have negative consequences for the towing industry and consumers.

Halifax Regional Police and the RCMP recently announced they have entered into a partnership agreement with a private company to set up collision reporting centres (CRCs) in Halifax Regional Municipality. Halifax will be the testing site for a collision centre expansion into Atlantic Canada. This new approach is expected to save insurance companies and consumers money and also save the police force time and money while providing good data on accidents. These are all reasonable goals. The police claim the new program will have minimal impact on the towing industry.

The Roadside Responders Association (RRA) disagrees that the program will have minimal impact on its members. Tow operators were told that police will no longer attend

accident scenes, and accident vehicles are to be towed directly to the collision reporting centre, where pictures can be taken and motorists can file accident reports and contact their insurance companies. The insurance industry has cautioned the RRA that it will not pay additional towing and waiting fees for tow operators to attend the centres.

“Towing companies will have no alternative but to charge for the additional time.”

The RRA was concerned the new program would have some negative impacts on the towing industry, as well as consumers, and has consulted with towers in other provinces that have similar collision reporting centres. Based

on these consultations and its own analysis, the RRA has outlined several concerns:

● Accident Support Services International (the private company which will run the centres) states on its website that “Without exception, during business hours, towed vehicles must go directly to the reporting centre from the scene of the crash or accident.” Picking up a vehicle at one end of the city, towing it to the CRC, filing a report, and then towing the vehicle to a collision repair shop takes considerably longer than the old system of towing the vehicle to the towing company’s yard. Towing companies will have no alternative but to charge insurance companies and consumers for the additional time. Of even greater concern are the huge time delays caused by lineups at the CRCs during inclement weather. Tow operators in Alberta

and Ontario have told the RRA that in the winter it is not unusual to have four or five tow trucks tied up for hours waiting in line at CRCs. This means that these trucks are not available to respond to priority calls such as police requests and accidents, let alone calls from regular customers, who can be left stranded for hours.

② When a vehicle is taken to a CRC, the insurance company is contacted. Towers in Alberta and Ontario report that when this happens, in order to avoid paying additional towing and storage fees, insurance companies will insist that the tower tow the vehicle directly from the CRC to an insurance-approved collision repair shop, where the vehicle will be stored for free. This reduces the insurance company's costs, but it also reduces the towing company's towing and storage revenue. The revenue from towing and storing vehicles that will be repaired helps to pay the salaries of towing company support staff and other overhead costs. It subsidizes the cost of towing and storing vehicles that have been impounded, written off, or abandoned by the owners. Without this revenue, towers will find it necessary to increase their towing and storage rates.

③ Towers are concerned about the potential liability stemming from towing vehicles to the unsecured lots of insurance-approved collision repair shops. Who will be held responsible for personal property lost or stolen from these vehicles or for further damage sustained by these vehicles in these unsecured lots? Do the insurance-approved collision repair shops have the means of storing this volume of cars? If they don't, will they not be forced to construct secured lots and start charging for storage just as towers do now?

④ Towing companies are also concerned about liability issues when they are forced to act as a cab service, transporting customers from accident scenes to CRCs and then to collision repair shops. There have been many drivers and passengers who did not realize they were injured until after they arrived at a CRC and regained their composure. Many of these were then taken to the hospital. Towing companies fear that they may be held liable for complications arising from the delay in treating these injuries.

⑤ Since they are owned by private companies funded by the insurance industry, and their concern is with the efficient routing of damaged vehicles, CRCs are not concerned with whether

towing companies are paid for their work. Once a vehicle is towed to an insurance-approved collision repair shop, the towing company no longer has control of the vehicle and will have more trouble putting a lien on the vehicle to ensure it gets paid.

⑥ Since CRCs eliminate the need for a police officer to attend the scene of a minor accident, those drivers who cause accidents will not be held accountable for their bad driving habits. No tickets will be issued and no fines collected, reducing government revenue.

⑦ The fact that the police will no longer attend minor collisions will encourage "accident chasing" by unscrupulous tow operators like those who have become the scourge of the towing industry in other provinces. Tow trucks racing to collision scenes are a major reason tow trucks have the worst accident rating of all classes of vehicles in Ontario. Unscrupulous "chasers" will often convince the consumer of the need to tow a perfectly roadworthy vehicle, citing fictitious safety concerns while directing the customer to a specific collision repair shop in exchange for a finder's fee from the shop; and charge exorbitant fees for towing. These abuses could not occur if the police were on the scene, and unscrupulous towers would likely soon leave the industry, leaving the work to be done by legitimate towers.

⑧ In some cases, CRCs restrict trade by determining who is allowed to tow vehicles out of their yards and by interfering with consumer choice. A CRC may direct vehicles to the collision repair shops it chooses or to those suggested by an insurance company. There are instances where vehicle owners may wish to deal with collision damage on their own rather than

filing a claim with their insurance company; they may be unable to do so if the vehicle is taken directly to a CRC and if the CRC then sends the vehicle to an insurance-approved collision repair shop.

"Towers are concerned about the potential liability."

In light of the above concerns, the RRA requested Halifax Regional Police to ensure that, as far as possible, collision reporting centre staff not be permitted to interfere with current towing and storage practices or contract agreements. A second request was made that towing company managers be allowed to use their own discretion in reporting to the collision reporting centres in inclement weather. This will ensure that at these times tow trucks will remain available to respond to priority calls such as police requests and accidents, as well as high volumes of calls from regular customers. Tow companies will then be able to bring the damaged vehicles to CRCs in an orderly fashion without excessive lineups once the crisis is over.

The Halifax Regional Police responded to the RRA's concerns; claiming many of the concerns addressed by the towing industry are private matters between the insurance industry and the towing company and not processes the police would become involved in. They declined to comment on specific liability concerns and claim it is not their role to facilitate any civil process to the benefit or detriment of any company. ❄️

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