

Local officer brings safety to Romania

Romanian officials plan to create a 12,000 square metre school to teach road safety education to police officers and paramedics from around the world.

The news is encouraging to retired Toronto Police Sgt. Ted Holtzheuser, who introduced a program he conceived to offer free road safety equipment, training and evaluation at the first annual International Road Safety Academy conference held last week in Istanbul, Turkey.

Operation Golden Hour offers the equipment and expertise to police and paramedics in the developing world. Its goal: to prevent collisions, and to save lives in developing countries during "the golden hour" - the critical time after a car crash when most deaths occur.

"The international standard for first response is between seven and eight minutes," Holtzheuser said, the day after his return to Toronto. "In some countries, that response doesn't happen in the first hour."

Deaths in staggering numbers are often the result, he said. In developing countries, traffic injuries and deaths often plunge families into financial ruin.

At the conference, the 26-year police veteran presented the first of dozens of radar gun sets donated by police services across Ontario to an Ethiopian official for use in the African nation.

The first training session for Ethiopian police officers on the radar guns is expected to occur in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia this summer, Holtzheuser said. Another course is planned in Romania this October.

In both nations, approximately 50 per cent of road deaths involve a pedestrian, Holtzheuser said. "The cause of death is usually a speeding motorist. Medical facilities are lacking. Police officers and paramedics there need first aid training."

Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair has committed to discuss the Operation Golden Hour program with other police service officials throughout Ontario in aid of further donations.

Help is also needed from storage companies, airlines, shipping companies and couriers to transport the equipment overseas. Medical personnel are also being recruited to train abroad.

Medical professionals in hospitals across Toronto and Toronto EMS paramedics have expressed interest in travelling overseas to conduct training, he reported.

He is currently negotiating with an airline to donate a few seats and storage for stretchers and medical equipment.

"We have the technology, the know-how, the ability to help these people. It's just a matter of getting people on board to help."

While AIDS remains the No. 1 cause of death in Africa, the United Nations predicts traffic fatalities will equal AIDS deaths within 15 years.

SAFETY SYMPOSIUM

Currently, traffic collisions are the third leading cause of death in Africa.

A traffic safety symposium to update Toronto and area police and emergency services personnel on Operation Golden Hour will be held at The Old Mill on September 14-15.

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