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Truckers keeping eye out for human traffickers



By Kathryn Burnham, Cornwall Standard Freeholder
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CORNWALL - The lone trucker out on the road travels far and wide, crossing paths with many people, which makes them perfect for helping to spot human traffickers, said Duncan Baird, who is co-ordinating the Truck STOP program.

The campaign is the newest out of the Ottawa group Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans.

"The view is that truckers and frequent travelers, just by the virtue that they are in motion, they are moving around, they are possibly intersecting the routes and activities of traffickers, both on the road and at their destination points," Baird said.

The campaign aims to increase truck drivers' awareness of the signs of human trafficking - and the history of the industry in Canada - with the help of a free audio documentary released on CD at truck stops along Highway 401 from Cornwall to Windsor.

Rob Short, manager of the Fifth Wheel in Cornwall, said he first learned of the project at a recent truck show.

"Being that we are in close proximity to the highway, there are a lot of transient customers coming through," Short said. They see about 700 people per day that aren't locals, he said, and are a common stopping point for drivers heading into Quebec or after crossing the border.

Short said the convenience and anonymity of truck stops, where it is easy to not draw stares, makes them vulnerable to smugglers or traffickers.

"We want to make sure our staff are well-tooled to spot stuff that isn't normal behaviour or is suspicious so we can report it," he said.

Signs an individual may be involved in human trafficking including those who seem afraid, tired, confused and watched.

PACT is asking truckers who suspect someone is trafficking, and meets several of those signs, contact local police or Crime Stoppers with their tip.

Short said the trucking industry has also been called upon by police to help out in instances of missing or wanted people, as their network helps get the message out.

Fifth Wheel outlets across Ontario are just one of the stops involved in the campaign.

PACT is using Ontario as a pilot project, but is looking to expand into Quebec in the fall, Baird added.

The campaign is complementary to a U.S. project known as Truckers Against Human Trafficking.

Baird said they are sharing materials with the organization that has had success south of the border.

He said at home, the support has been strong from both the trucking industry and the government, such as the RCMP and CBSA, who is looking to use the material for training programs.

