



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the
director's chair

WATCH for the signs

Truck drivers have been watching out for years, calling in drunk drivers, traffic accidents, and suspicious activity at rest areas and truck stops. Now PACT-Ottawa, a non-profit organization committed to preventing human trafficking, is calling on drivers to use that “something-is-not-quite-right” sixth sense that most of them have, to be part of the solution to a devastating problem.

We helped Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans (PACT-Ottawa), launch its TruckSTOP campaign at Truck World in April, where campaign coordinator Kim Howson and volunteer Ian Thiesson joined us to introduce the program to drivers. Not only that, we got to introduce them to hundreds of drivers, which just confirmed their hunch that truck drivers can make a valuable contribution to combating human trafficking.

Wait a sec. Human trafficking? In Canada? For many people, this is a crime that conjures up bad stuff that happens somewhere on the other side of the world. They're shocked to learn that in the True North Strong and Free, it is indeed a serious problem. Men, women and children – Canadian citizens, permanent residents, new immigrants and refugees – are bought and sold here every day.

Because it's an underground crime, it's difficult to determine the extent of human trafficking, both in Canada and worldwide. Numbers vary, but even on the low end of the scale, they're shocking. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 2.45 million persons are currently being exploited as victims of human trafficking.

The crime of trafficking in human beings is extremely lucrative. The United Nations estimates that human trafficking is currently one of the most profitable criminal activities worldwide, with total revenues as high as \$42.5 billion annually.

But while numbers may differ, law enforcement and other agencies all agree on one thing: human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing crimes in the world and shows no signs of slow-

ing down.

The RCMP gives a conservative estimate that 800 to 1,200 people are trafficked into and through Canada every year, but other organizations would peg the number as high as 15,000. Canada is considered a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of prostitution and forced labour, with a large number of victims trafficked through Canada to the US.

These statistics don't include a growing number of domestic trafficking cases involving Canadian women and girls, and even then, those we know about likely represent only a fraction of the actual number of human trafficking cases. Due to threats, violence or coercion, most trafficking victims are unable to come forward.

In 2005, Canada introduced laws against human trafficking, but as of February this year, there have been only a paltry 10 convictions. At the moment, there are 57 more cases before the courts involving at least 91 accused and 156 victims. The majority of these victims are Canadians, trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Some of this scary stuff hits pretty close to home. In 2009, an Ottawa woman was the first female convicted of human trafficking in Canada. She pled guilty to trafficking three young women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The girls were drugged, tethered inside a Gatineau, Que. apartment for periods of several days, and forced into prostitution. Their attempts to escape were met with brutal punishment.

All three girls were minors at the time they were abducted. And two of them were abducted from a women's shelter where I volunteer, not a 10-minute walk away from my home.

As well, forced labour cases, involving foreign nationals, are being more frequently identified in Canada.

In April this year, a Hamilton, Ont. court



**Joanne
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brought down convictions in the first successful case of international victims trafficked into Canada and the first successful forced-labour case. A family trafficking ring recruited people from Hungary to work in construction for little or no pay, keeping them in the family's basements and taking their travel documents. Nineteen victims, none of whom spoke English when they were recruited, were forced to claim refugee status and apply for welfare, which went to the family.

So what's this all got to do with trucking? Transportation is a key element of human trafficking, as traffickers move their victims frequently to isolate them and to avoid detection. Truckers, who drive the same routes as victims are shuttled along, are an untapped resource. They're the “eyes of the road” according to PACT, and there's a high potential for drivers who are knowledgeable about human trafficking to notice suspicious activity and alert the appropriate authorities.

The TruckSTOP toolkit includes an audio CD that provides truck drivers with information on signs they can look for to identify possible human trafficking activity.

After handing out more than 400 CDs at Truck World, the PACT gang hit the road to distribute posters and 3,000 more CDs to truck stops in southern Ontario. If all goes well, PACT hopes to develop a network to roll out TruckSTOP nationally.

You can visit the PACT Web site at www.pact-truckstop.org to get more information on the campaign and to see TruckSTOP locations. Get informed. Watch for the signs. You can help put the brakes on human trafficking.