

Rudolph the Red Nosed partygoer shouldn't be driving home

Operation Red Nose starts this weekend, but planning ahead is still the recommended holiday strategy

Here's a pop quiz for you: does anyone know what Operation Red Nose is?

Is it the phenomenon that occurs when you bundle up and head out in minus 20-degree weather to shovel the driveway? Or is it the medical condition most of us deal with in January or so, when the evil cold and flu bugs launch their major campaign, rightly assuming we've been weakened from shovelling all that snow?

Not quite. Operation Red Nose is a program aimed at curbing drinking and driving over the holiday season. It's a good idea that's come a long, long way.

The program is now entering its 17th year nationally. It started as a single chapter in Quebec, and has grown to the point where now 96 volunteer organizations across Canada participate in making sure holiday revellers (and their vehicles) get home in one piece.

Here's how it works. Imagine it's your staff Christmas party, and for



**Road
Wise**

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some inexplicable reason this year's bash turns out to be a lot more fun than usual. You have a few laughs, a couple of Swedish meatballs and one too many glasses of punch. Before you know it, it's time to go home... but you can't drive. At least, you shouldn't.

You've got options

You have the usual options: hand the keys to a friend, take a bus, or hail a cab. But let's say your friends are in no better shape than you are, it's still minus 20-degrees outside and the nearest "bus shelter" is a contradiction in terms, and there isn't a cab for miles. Now what?

Enter Operation Red Nose. A team

of volunteers is standing by, waiting for your call. Three volunteers are dispatched to your location: two will tuck you and your friends carefully into your car and drive you home, while a third follows behind in another vehicle. There is no fee for this service, but donations are gratefully accepted, as is your undying gratitude to them for bailing you out of a bad situation.

Now, how's that for unbeatable service?!

MPI is proud to support Operation Red Nose, which will be swinging into gear in five Manitoba communities (Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson, The Pas and Flin Flon) as early as this weekend. Last year, dedicated Operation Red Nose volunteers kept over 3,000 drinking drivers off Manitoba streets and roads.

Now, here's the rub. Despite logging record-breaking numbers each year, the point of the program is not to drive up the numbers of people using the

service, but rather to increase awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving, and of the importance of planning ahead.

Plan before you party

Operation Red Nose volunteers are renowned for their loyalty to the program, and their dedication to the cause. What they would like to see is exactly the same thing I would like to see: partygoers planning how they are getting home before heading out to enjoy the holiday festivities. This is a key point. The time to start thinking about how you're getting home is not when you've already had a few. And keep in mind that impromptu gatherings are the norm this time of year, and it's easy to get carried away.

Operation Red Nose is a program designed to prevent motorists who've had too much to drink from making a lethal decision. They're a "safety net" for those partygoers who find themselves stuck at Location B without

a plan for getting back to Location A.

I urge you to make planning your safe ride home as much a part of your evening as agonizing whether *this* shirt goes with *these* pants. Operation Red Nose is there for you, if you need them, but they'd prefer you do the most responsible thing and work out your own strategy for getting home.

Operation Red Nose will be on the streets of Winnipeg December 1, 2, 8, 9, 14 through 16, 18 through 23, and 29 through 31. You can reach them by calling 947-NOSE (6673). If you live in another Operation Red Nose community, check your local media for dates and contact information.

That's it for this week. Until next week, be **Road Wise**.

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