

# TOLL STRY

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bruary.

ican automakers,  
so far been unaf-

ected by the crisis. Parts arriving  
from China have a significant  
delivery lag time, enough that  
there has been some time to  
source other suppliers.

Indeed, if there's a cause for  
concern in North America, it's  
the seeming lack of concern from  
politicians, especially south of  
the border. Trump has down-  
played the dangers, claiming  
(optimistically) that infections  
will soon fall to zero.

Considering how fast the virus  
is spreading and how dramatic  
the responses are — Japan is  
thinking of closing its schools  
for a month and Saudi Arabia  
has suspended all pilgrimages  
to Mecca for foreigners — it may  
be only a matter of time before  
GM, Ford, and all the transplants  
operating in the U.S. and Canada  
are affected, if by nothing else  
but continued parts shortages.

If this rapidly escalating trend  
to isolation continues, the effect  
on global sales is sure to be dra-  
matic.

Moody's had already pre-  
dicted global sales would fall  
0.9 per cent this year. It has  
recently revised its predictions  
and now estimates a whopping  
2.5-per-cent decline. That's a  
difference of about 1.3 million  
units, all directly attributable to  
COVID-19.

Even that 2.5-point drop may  
prove optimistic. Presidential  
admonishments that there's  
nothing to worry about notwith-  
standing, if the coronavirus crisis  
reaches North American shores,  
a total rout is not out of the realm  
of possibility.

Experts are already suggesting  
we buy extra supplies of canned  
goods and medical supplies.  
Perhaps we should stock up on  
batteries and brake pads, too.

*Driving.ca*

# Beware of rogue elements working in the towing industry

Prepare a plan to protect yourself in case  
of a crash, writes *Lorraine Sommerfeld*.

With little regulation and a  
patchwork of laws that change  
from region to region, the towing  
industry has long been a kind of  
Wild West, with some operators  
acting like mobsters. Every stripe  
of provincial government prom-  
ises regulation and change, but  
none deliver.

How do you protect yourself  
from rogue tow-truck drivers  
and the possible fallout? Like  
most things, being prepared is  
everything. It sounds easy, but  
if you've just been involved in  
a collision or are broken down  
by the side of the highway, your  
coping mechanisms may be a  
little spun. Prepare for that sit-  
uation now by writing a planned  
course of action in a crash, and a  
printed-out task list to keep you  
on track.

Teresa Di Felice, assistant  
vice-president of government  
and community relations for the  
Canadian Automobile Associa-  
tion (CAA), says that organiza-  
tion has layers of protection built  
in for members.

"We have strict requirements  
for anyone driving a tow truck  
for the CAA. They undergo  
training, we have contractual  
agreements, they are audited and  
mystery-shopped," she says.

Operators have CAA-issued  
badges with their names and  
photos on them, and they carry  
tablets that allow them to prove  
they are answering your call.

Be aware of the schemes  
Her No. 1 piece of advice? "Never  
sign a blank work order," she  
advises. "Never."

If a tow-truck driver hands you  
a blank work order and assures  
you it will be fine, it will not be  
fine. You wouldn't sign a blank  
cheque, so don't sign a blank  
work order.

Her words are echoed by Mark  
Graves, president of the Pro-  
vincial Towing Association of  
Ontario (PTAO).

"That work order has to have  
an amount on it. By law, they  
can't ultimately bill you more  
than 10 per cent over that. You

will be, and to get that number in  
writing."

Reputable towing organiza-  
tions are calling for proper pro-  
vincial regulation and oversight.

If you need a tow-truck driver,  
you can call CAA if you have that  
service. You can Google a garage  
close by.

The biggest red flag, says  
Graves, is high-pressure tactics,  
which "are a huge sign" that  
something isn't right.

Di Felice adds another com-  
mon promise that is used by  
some tow-truck drivers: "You  
have CAA? Don't worry, you pay  
me now and they'll reimburse  
you."

Di Felice says CAA never  
requires you to pay up front for  
a tow, especially in cash, another  
common tactic on the dark side  
of the industry.

"If a tow-truck driver is intimid-  
ating you, it's time to call 911,"  
says Di Felice.

Graves says the PTAO did a  
survey and found 92 per cent of  
respondents had no clue if their  
insurance covered them for a tow  
after a crash. Read your policy or  
call your broker. Also understand  
that a tow is about much more  
than your car dangling from a  
hook, and could include travel,  
storage, impounds and fees.

The best way to take back  
control at a time when you feel  
you have none is to be prepared.  
Print the CAA Towing Bill of  
Rights and keep it in your car. It's  
excellent, whether you're a CAA  
member or not.

Plan ahead. Chances are you  
travel the same route often.  
Check the location of dealers you  
trust where you can direct your  
vehicle to be towed, even if you're  
not in your home city.

Talk to your own trusted  
garage, Graves suggests, and get  
a list of body shops they trust to  
work with. Have this information  
on hand. Keep all of this infor-  
mation in your glove box. Tell  
anyone who drives your car what  
to do in a crash, and where to find  
this information.



China dropped more than 90 per cent in early February after