

A rude awakening

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Siamak Kazemeini-Monfared got a lift to work the other day. He can't drive any more. He lost his licence because he snores. Read on.

Sam runs a recycling company in Scarborough; he collects used computers and ships them to India where they are harvested of precious metals and usable parts.

We were sitting in his office the other day. He said, "I'm a man. I snore a little. One day my wife said, `You snore a lot. Why don't you go to the doctor?'"

A man does as his wife suggests.

Sam said, "I don't know if the snoring is a problem. I sleep like a baby, nine hours every night. I wake up every morning at 7:25 sharp. I sleep fine. I've slept through bombs. But my wife wanted me to go to the doctor, so I —"

Wait a second. Bombs?

"When Iraq was bombing Iran, I was there. I slept through it. No kidding. My wife woke me up. She said, `They're dropping bombs.' I don't have a problem sleeping." Clearly, he does not.

He said, "I sleep so good you can't believe it. I'm always fresh and peppy in the morning." Who among us can say the same?

Sam said, "Anyway, I went to the doctor, and he sent me to a sleep clinic. I slept there a couple of times. They put some equipment on me and they sent me to a specialist who gave me some other tests. I had to blow in a tube. I was blowing as hard as I can. The specialist gave me a phone number to get this machine."

Sam unpacked what seemed to be a gas mask connected by means of a vacuum-cleaner hose to a small humidifier. He clamped the mask on his face. It made him look like an elephant.

He took off the mask and said, "My first reaction? I'm not going to get a machine; are you going to sleep next to your wife with this thing on your face?"

I took his point.

He said, "Anyway, I was about to go to India for 3 1/2 weeks, and then I was going to the United States – I am opening up another facility in Georgia – so I didn't get the machine. When I came back from Georgia last week, I found this letter."

The letter, from the Deputy Registrar of Motor Vehicles, reads in part:

"The ministry has received a report indicating that you suffer from a medical condition, which may impair your ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. This report was submitted by a physician in compliance with section 203 of the Highway Traffic Act.

"After considering all the relevant facts available, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles has decided to suspend your driving privilege for medical reasons under Section 47(1) of the Highway Traffic Act. An official notice of suspension will be mailed to you under separate cover.

"Although you may be disappointed, this decision has been reached to ensure both your own safety and that of other road users."

The letter concluded with some unapologetic blather, and a couple of telephone numbers to call if he wished to appeal.

Sam said, "I read the letter and panicked, I didn't know what to do." Did he appeal? He rolled his eyes. "I didn't call the ministry. There's no use. They're going to give you the whole nine yards."

I tried the phone numbers listed on his letter: four futile calls plus five minutes of recorded messages equals nine yards of nothing.

He said no one warned him this would happen.

In any case, he got the peculiar machine the other day, and has worn it to bed ever since. It cost him more than \$400 out of pocket; provincial health insurance paid more than \$800 on top of that. Sam is not convinced of its utility and the mask has given him a rash on the bridge of his nose.

He said, "I've been driving since I was 17 years old. That's 29 years with no accidents. Not a single fender bender. But I have to wear this thing. It has a meter. It records usage. If I don't comply ..." He is complying. He will get his licence back as a result.

But here's the thing:

His licence was jerked. He was not warned. He is always fresh and peppy in the morning. He is reckoned to have sleep apnea but has never dozed off inexplicably, and he is not a long-distance trucker, nor is he a man who must drive much at night. I think Sam and his doctor and the sleep specialist need to have a little chat.

And I have a question for the ministry:

If sleep apnea is so serious that my doctor is required to rat me out, and if it is so serious that I can lose my licence if I don't get the damn machine, then why was I given a licence without first being tested for sleep apnea?

Oh. I see. I am supposed to declare if I have a medical condition when I apply for a licence. Who, me? No, sir. I have never snored. I do not snore now. And I have no plans of snoring in the future.

If you know what I mean.