

Average of 32 hit-and-runs a day, police figures show

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After a particularly horrific hit-and-run collision in which a 17-year-old girl nearly lost her life Monday night, Toronto Police Service Detective Paul Lobsinger came to work yesterday wondering whether there had been an upswing in hit-and-runs this year.

But as he ran the numbers, Det. Lobsinger, who supervises the office that investigates hit-and-run accidents, concluded that this year is pretty much in line with last year.

While the numbers themselves look high -- 5,323 from Jan. 1 to June 28 that involved only property damage and another 468 personal-injury hit-and-runs -- they are about half the total numbers for last year, he said.

That means there are about 32 hit-and-runs a day in Toronto.

If there is a trend, Det. Lobsinger said, it may be the reason people say they are driving away from an accident.

While there is no one answer to the question of why people run -- some leave because they are already wanted by police or they are driving with a suspended licence -- a growing number of drivers flee because "insurance is so expensive now."

"People feel: I can't face this, I've got to get out of here," he said.

"Someone who has a couple of tickets, has a couple of vehicles, is probably paying \$4,000, \$5,000, and a lot of people don't make what I make. I don't know how they do it, and that's where it is understandable that people panic and drive away," Det. Lobsinger said.

He also said police officers are troubled by another trend: While many of the fleeing cars have passengers in them, few of those passengers help in police investigations. This happens even if they have no criminal or civil liability for the accident. But in Det. Lobsinger's view, they have a moral responsibility to assist police.

In the Monday collision, for example, "there were four young girls, approximately the same age as the victim, in the vehicle, who knew exactly what had happened and that that girl was hit and could have died right there, and not one of them picked up the phone and called us. That's shameful. That's disgusting."

Police yesterday charged Oswald Quiroz Jr., 21, of Maple, Ont., with dangerous driving causing bodily harm and failing to stop after an accident causing bodily harm.