

**NZ Roadmarkers' Federation Inc.
and the Roadmarking Industry of Australia**

2009 Conference

19-20th August 2009-07-27

**Rutherford Hotel
NELSON**

Abstract: Superintendent Paula Rose

So we want a road toll of 200? Which 200 will we sacrifice?

New Zealand fits pretty solidly into world road safety trends. We are doing better than many countries but still are far from the best. A number of extremely successful European countries put their post-war energy and money into engineering, whereas in New Zealand, we have put our emphasis on enforcement and modifying driver behaviour. There is an argument that suggests we may have taken this as far as we can and we should now consider engineering options more carefully.

As Police enforcement becomes increasingly specific and road policing becomes increasingly targeted, decisions must be made about where our efforts are concentrated. Are there new areas that we can concentrate on? Can we find new ways to be more effective?

This presentation looks at the significant areas of risk, the behaviours or groups that contribute most to death and injury on our roads. Is it feasible to target one or several of these groups to effect any change? Do we sacrifice one group or behaviour, and put all our energy in to another where we believe we will make the most gains?

Superintendent Rose will take a detailed look at these groups and behaviours, leaving plenty of time at the end to discuss the issues with you.

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New Zealand Police

NZ Roadmarkers Federation Conference - Nelson Wednesday 19th August 2009

So we want a road toll of 200? Which 200 will we sacrifice?

Introduction

This presentation looks at some of the options for reducing the road toll in New Zealand. As Police enforcement becomes increasingly specific and road policing becomes increasingly targeted, decisions must be made about where our efforts are concentrated. Are there new areas that we can concentrate on? Can we find new ways to be more effective?

Can we save everyone? If we are not going to try to save everyone, who are we going to abandon? Who will we try hardest with – should it be young people, after all, the old ones have had their chances. Should it be the old people, after all, the young don't seem to be interested in listening (about lots of things!!). Should it be the disadvantaged – maybe we can make the biggest impact there -should we focus where we are likely to get the best results?

Where are we now?

New Zealand fits pretty solidly into world trends. We are doing better than many countries but still are far from the best. A number of extremely successful European countries put their post-war energy and money into engineering, whereas in New Zealand, we have put our emphasis on enforcement and modifying driver behaviour. There is an argument that suggests we may have taken this as far as we can and we should now consider engineering options more carefully.

In most developed countries, the road toll is now plateauing or increasing slightly and New Zealand is no different. While our road toll is decreasing in the long term, in the short term we are facing an alarming rise in deaths and injuries. We also need to start looking more closely at hospitalizations as these are increasing alarmingly and the truth is, we have not introduced any significant new initiatives to warrant any real change in the rate at which people are dying on New Zealand roads.

Much of the perception of public safety or the risks on the roads are based around preconceived or stereotypical responses. For example, the fear of crime is something that is fanned by the type of media coverage we are all exposed to and this drives unreliable and inaccurate fear.

The comparison between the fear of crime and the fear of exposure to death or injury on the roads is a good way of highlighting this. The way we see things, may not reflect reality at all.

Homicides

Homicide rates have remained relatively stable over the last ten years while the road toll has fallen. Our success can be accurately measured but the facts are, the risk of death or injury on the roads is far more predicable and road deaths affect many more "ordinary " New Zealanders than homicides.

The vast majority of homicides are linked to criminals and criminal behaviour but despite this, fear of lawless behaviour remains a serious concern for many ordinary citizens, and in particular older citizens.

The murders of several older women in their homes over the years, serve to frighten older people, particularly those living alone. The stories receive huge media coverage, the victims are usually blameless and the random nature of the crime serves to cause much angst in the community but they are isolated and very unusual events.

Serious traffic offending, on the other hand, has been linked to mainstream offending both empirically and anecdotally. We have nowhere near the same level of fear around traffic offenders - in the minds of many, they are just good people who got unlucky. But the evidence shows that those who commit serious traffic crime also appear to partake in general criminal activity.

Consequently, serious traffic offenders cannot be thought of as otherwise law-abiding members of the public. They are not simply members of the general driving population who are 'unlucky' enough to be caught. Instead, anti-social behaviour on the road is linked to criminal activity in other areas.

Road Policing and crime

Road Policing staff are on New Zealand roads 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Every year they contribute towards the 1.2 million police-issued notices for traffic offences and infringements. While on duty they carry out any number of traffic stops and cover thousands of kilometres in their travels.

The delivery of road policing therefore presents a perfect opportunity to assist in policing types of crime that are not traffic specific, particularly given the near universal use of motor vehicles as a mode of transport.

We have the opportunity to influence what goes on in the community. We are there, and we have the resources. We can make the community feel safer but we can also actually make communities safer and this effect is two-fold. We can reduce the risk of being killed or injured on the roads but at the same time, our very presence makes the community as a whole a safer place to be.

The big question is of course, is this enough?

What do we do next? A road toll of 200 – is that possible? and if it is- how do we do it?

Over the last few years, we have been saying that without significant new initiatives, we will not be able to make any significant change in the road toll. If we still believe this, how do we propose reaching our new targets?

The Fatal Five

So – what will it be??

Do we change our focus from working to drive a change in behaviour to changing the environment. If we were to put all our energy (and money) into engineering, into ensuring that we had the safest roads, would that work

Another option could be to re-focus our efforts and concentrate them. In that context, what I would like to have a look at the "fatal five" – by increasing or reducing our efforts with one or other of these groups, could we change anything? Or would we just be condemning one group?

Police policy to 2010 has been planned to focus on five categories of offending. We call these the "fatal five" and we consider that by putting our efforts into these offences, we will be able to get the best results.

They are:

- Speeding,
- Alcohol and Drugs,
- Failure to Wear Restraints,
- Dangerous and Careless Drivers (particularly intersections, failing to keep left, fatigue and distraction),
- High Risk Drivers (particularly DWD/unlicensed, young drivers, illegal street racing and recidivists).

We know that this is where the most deaths occur and this is where we can make the most significant difference. But, what if we were to concentrate on one group? For instance, put all our efforts in to policing high-risk drivers (as many people seem to want us to do) and put the minimum of effort into the rest ? We may save the lives of more young people, but will it be at the expense of another whole group in society?

Speeding

We put a huge proportion of our resources into both enforcement and advertising around controlling speed and there is some evidence to suggest that we are making headway. Average speeds have dropped significantly over the past few years and in some places such as the Bay of Plenty, they were as low as 91.5kmph in 2007.

Recent results in some Districts demonstrate some very encouraging results. They have reported that the numbers of motorists caught driving over the speed limit in the past year is well down on the past two years.

So – do we keep on working on reducing speed through enforcement and advertising – would that be enough?

Drink/drugged driving

But, while speed may be reducing and we are catching fewer speeding drivers, drink driving is increasing alarmingly. The reasons for this are complex and may well reflect the complexity of the society we now live in.

However what we do know is that the majority, in fact, 80% of drunk drivers are first offenders. This means that whilst recidivists are high risk, they are low in number. The biggest crash risk is from "the average" drunk Kiwi.

Recidivists will always form part of the population, and should be dealt with firmly, but focusing on them alone will not reduce overall crash numbers to any extent. There will always be those who simply are not deterred by penalties. Police are catching an extra 1,000 drunk drivers a year and the message is still not getting through to enough of the population. It is not enough to RARELY drive drunk, once is one time too many.

We also need to factor in the influence of drugged driving. The facts around drug driving are not particularly clear at the moment but the new legislation which will provide Police with better options to test for drugs, will be introduced late this year and will provide us with further options in making the roads safer for everyone.

Restraints

We have been very successful in encouraging the whole population to wear restraints but there are probably some people here who can still remember the bad old days. It has been suggested that the safety belt has saved more lives than any other road safety invention and we have seen that in the road safety gains we have made.

Police used to routinely see people who had been thrown from vehicles, and also people with horrific injuries from crashing through windscreens. It is not so much hitting the windscreen that does the damage; it is

coming back through it as the vehicle slams to a stop. We don't get so many these days, thank goodness. Many drivers have also been killed or terribly injured by their unrestrained passengers who are thrown around the inside of the vehicle.

The use of restraints in the rear seats has made a big difference also, and minimized the numbers of people being thrown right into the driver from behind. But – we are still getting people who die unnecessarily because they do not heed the message - can we save more here?

Dangerous/careless driving

And what about this group? Are they one group or a whole lot of different issues that we have conveniently lumped together and do we see them clearly. Pedestrians for instance – the popular view is that there are increasing pedestrian fatalities – is this the result of i-pods,mp3 players, cell phones and general distraction on the part of both driver and pedestrian? The statistics do not actually support this, in fact, in 2007 there were 45 pedestrian fatalities and in 2006, 44 plus nearly 100 fewer injuries.

High -risk drivers

And then there are the "boy racers", the recidivists and all the other anti-social offenders that we love to blame. The rise in the size and activity of the "boy racer" community has been causing significant problems for Police in recent times. And while this group accounts for roughly 2% of the driving population, and 2% of the road toll, they take up roughly 20% of Road Police time in some areas.

"Boy racers" seem to be able to enrage a good half of the population and some of the rage is the age-old - "it must be those young people"- "in my day " - "it's them - not me" and all the other age-old denials. However, we cannot deny that we have significant issues here and ones that are taking up an enormous amount of our time. Legislation will be introduced later in the year which will assist Police in tacking the problem.

Conclusion

This is a very brief overview of the primary groups at risk. Is it feasible to target one or several of these groups to effect any change?

One of the factors that is most relevant here is that of our outstanding success at operating in a co-operative way. It has been the joint efforts of the full range of groups and agencies that has really impacted on the outcomes. This is something we cannot do without. Continued cooperative action, coupled with some of the major initiatives that we are working towards may be a more realistic and practical solution.

However, we all need to keep in mind that we are the road toll - not them and we must all take responsibility for our own safety and the safety of others.

Police cannot do it for you - we never have and we never will.
Safety on the roads is all about taking it personally and taking it to heart.

Thank you
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