**Road Deaths in an Irish context; the issues?**

At the time of creating the original presentation (late September) on which this report is based the death toll on Irish Roads for 2016 was at one-hundred and forty-one, a number which was already a five percent increase on the same time in 2015 (An Garda Siochana, 2016). Due to exceptional circumstances the presentation was postponed by one month (to the 8th November 2016). During that four week period the number of people who lost their lives on our roads increased by a further ***seventeen*** people. The presentation seeks to present and highlight the principal issues that contribute to these stark statistics in order to bring more focus to bear on this issue that touches the lives of so many every year.

Last year (2015) saw the lowest number of people killed on Irish roads since 2012 but this still means that one-hundred and sixty-six people dies-many of these accidents were unnecessary and could have been prevented. As a nation we need to establish what lies behind these figures and how can this information help us to save more lives?

***Speed***

Excessive speed was found to be ***the*** major contributor to road deaths either as the sole factor or combined with alcohol or other factors in 32% of cases during 2008 -2012 (RSA Fatal Collisions 2008-2012). A stark statistic which illustrates the danger of excessive speed is that if a car travelling at 30km per hour hits a pedestrian only one in ten pedestrians will be killed, while at 60km nine out of ten pedestrians will be killed. This illustrates that the control of speed in whatever ways are possible i.e education, road engineering etc is key to bringing down road deaths.

***Alcohol***

As with speed, drink driving is also still a significant factor in Irish road deaths being a contributory factor in thirty-eight percent of collisions where someone died in the four years from 2008 to 2012 and accounting for twenty-nine percent of motorcyclist’s deaths in the same period (RSA.ie, 2016 in single vehicle deaths alcohol was consumed in 62% of cases (Bedford 2005).

The RSA uses the term a ‘chronic’ problem about drink-driving in Ireland, in other words, a problem that endures despite all efforts to address it. In June 2016, the Independent.ie reported on a Red C Poll conducted in association with the Pat Kenny Show on Newstalk that one in four of those surveyed have been passengers in a car with a drunk motorist and more than seventy percent have had difficulty in the past assessing whether they were over the limit the morning after consuming alcohol (Melia P. 2016). One in four also believed the drink driving limit is too low (Melia P. 2016)!

A survey published by the AA showed that sixty-eight percent of its members agreed that those who are convicted of drunk-driving offences should have their names published on a live register which at face value seems like a good idea but forty-five percent said that it would not affect their behaviour while driving (theAA.ie,2016). Even before it is considered by those with power its viability as a deterrent is already in question.

***Seatbelts***

The wearing of seatbelts is another major issue in road deaths despite campaigns by the RSA, the AA, the Gardaí and even our own cars putting out constant reminders to put on seatbelts. In 2015 in approximately 30% of road deaths the non-wearing of seat belts was involved. Like the use of alcohol this is a factor within the control of the driver.

The careless attitude to the wearing of seatbelts has even extended to new trends with the belts themselves among young drivers. JOE.IE has reported recently on a practice among young drivers in Donegal who are installing extra clips to prevent the alarm going off when the safety belt is not clipped in. Donegal is already a county with a reputation for many horrific road deaths (the worst crash in the history of the country happened in Donegal in 2010 when eight people were killed in the one accident-most of these had no seatbelts on because the car was overcrowded).

***Vulnerable Road Users***

Due to an increase in the number of cyclists and motorcyclists on the road this group are now becoming more evident in the road fatality statistics and are known as ‘vulnerable road users’. In 2014 the number of cyclists killed had more than doubled in two years from 5 to 12.

At the time of publication nine cyclists have lost their lives in 2016, the same number that were killed in the whole of 2015 (Kelly O., 2016) while 16 motorcyclists have died in the same time. A cyclist collision tracker that is available on the DublinInquirer.com shows a concentration of accidents have happened at the junction near the Dublin City Council Offices on Wood Quay (Kapila L, O’Brien M, 2015).

***Where and Who?***

Statistics released earlier this year by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) showed that Dublin and Cork had the highest road fatality rate in 2015 (RSA, 2016). Many rural roads in Donegal and Cork are accident black spots and are particularly difficult to police due to the dispersal of roads and a wide range of ‘back’ roads.

Males made up seventy-eight percent of the one-hundred and sixty-six people (RSA, 2016). Most people lost their lives (RSA, 2016) on Sundays with the most dangerous times being between 6pm to 8pm. Sixteen to twenty-five year olds were the group with the highest number of fatalities (45) (RSA, 2016).

***What Can We Do ?***

To tackle the problem of road deaths there are three complementary pillars we adhere to in Ireland-Enforcement, Education and Engineering. The RSA Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 seeks to bring down road deaths to the level of the best performing countries like Sweden and Australia.

***Enforcement***

Enactment of appropriate laws on road safety and their enforcement by the Gardai and the Courts are vital in the effort to bring road deaths down. The penalty points system is proving to be an effective deterrent over the past decade in this regard.

The use of road safety technology such as the safety camera network is also part of this enforcement.

***Education***

Public campaigns about road safety through television, radio, social media, schools, colleges are another key component in the drive to shape public opinion to bring down the death and injury toll. The Christmas RSA/DOENI campaign is a good example of this because it graphically illustrates the consequences of road fatalities and injuries through the eyes of real people who have suffered injury themselves, or have lost a loved one.

***Engineering***

The design and building of roads to ensure that they promote safe driving and appropriate speed choices, as well as adequate and accurate signage reduce the incidence of accidents and mitigate the consequences of collisons.

***Conclusion***

Road safety is a shared responsibility involving the individual, the community and the state agencies. We must all work together to make our roads as safe as possible by 2020.

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