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IMPROVING WORK-RELATED ROAD SAFETY IN NEW ZEALAND

WHAT IS WORK-RELATED ROAD SAFETY?

Work-related road safety includes anyone driving for work, irrespective of vehicle ownership. In legal terms, it excludes commuting to a normal place of work, in most jurisdictions around the world. It is acknowledged, that such commuting losses can still cause major problems to individuals, industry and society.

Work-related road safety operates on two levels, both of which are important for government organisations:

- Macro/governmental/policy level laws, policies, initiatives and enforcement
- Micro/organisational/operations, policies and programs by individual organisations.

WHY IS WORK-RELATED ROAD SAFETY IMPORTANT FOR GOVERNMENT?

Transport safety statistics www.transport.govt.nz/motor-vehicle-crashes-in-new-zealand and www.ltsa.govt.nz/research/toll.html show that there are around 400 road fatalities each year in New Zealand. It is not known how many of these are work-related because 'purpose of journey' data is not available. Data from the UK and Australia suggests that up to a quarter or a third of all road fatalities may be work-related.

Australian data shows 58 percent of work-related fatalities involve driving or commuting to work or incidents on work sites. Recent Health and Safety in Employment Act amendments place a duty on employers to train employees to be safe in the public road environment, as it is now a workplace.

Work-related road safety offers an opportunity to reduce road safety fatalities and injuries and to target a 'receptive' audience through policy and programs. For this to occur it would be necessary to add a 'purpose of journey' field to the road safety data collection process.

Government has the capability to lead by setting a good example in work-related road safety research and interventions. The

Government's own fleet and workers may be responsible for a significant number of total traffic movements and crashes in New Zealand each year.

This series of workshops provided a catalyst for ongoing collaboration and co-operation to progress workplace driving safety in government and private motor fleets.

This is consistent with the Road Safety to 2010 Strategy implementation and extends the safety message of the social and environmental impacts of work-related road safety to the wider community.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK-RELATED ROAD SAFETY

Societal factors

Data on the true extent of the employee-driver effect on road safety is limited, because few jurisdictions around the world (including New Zealand) maintain any 'purpose of journey' information. The best data currently available is for Queensland, where at least 16 percent of hospitalisation crashes and 24 percent of fatal crashes over the period 1998-2002 involved someone driving for work. This issue of 'purpose of journey' data is considered in some detail during the remainder of the report.

Figure 1 - Societal reasons to improve work-related road safety (Source: Murray et al 2002)

1. Work-related vehicles are about 30 percent of registered vehicles in New Zealand (including 15 percent of cars).
2. Work drivers travel about three times the distance of the average private motorist in New Zealand (30,000 compared to 10,000 kilometres per annum).
3. Business travel accounts for about a third of all travel in New Zealand; over half if commuting to and from work is included.
4. Over 50 percent of new vehicles in New Zealand are initially purchased for commercial purposes. Most of them will be

integrated into the wider vehicle fleet within two to three years. Therefore, the safer they are, the better it is for New Zealand society in general.

5. IPRU (2003) research identified that work-related traffic fatalities make up almost a third of fatal injuries in the workplace in New Zealand.
6. Land Transport New Zealand data shows that obvious work vehicles, including trucks and buses, are involved in a significant number of the road fatalities in New Zealand each year.

Clearly there is a range of macro, societal or government-level reasons why work-related road safety is important to New Zealand. There is also a range of micro or organisational business, legal and cost reasons why it should be taken seriously.

Business factors

From an organisational or business perspective there is a clear link between benefits to safety, quality, customer service, efficiency and the environment by getting things right first time, achieving cost savings through better fuel efficiency and reduced asset wear and tear. Work-related road safety planning offers marketing, business development, corporate social responsibility, staff well-being and brand enhancement opportunities. At a simple level, it is better for your public profile to be in the news for promoting safety, or winning a safety award, than it is to have to suppress the outcomes of a major incident related to your business operation.

A PROACTIVE safety program can keep an organisation ahead of, and protected from, regulations and legal requirements. Proactive organisations shape and lead forthcoming regulations, giving them a competitive advantage in being ahead of reactive organisations. Many companies have used 'safety' as part of their business development process, and by promoting their safety systems to others.

Legal factors

The importance of the Occupational Health and Safety regulations, duty of care and chain of responsibility is increasing in the transport and road safety sectors. In the heavy truck sector, in particular, organisations are increasingly being forced to change their practices under the requirements of chain of responsibility regulations. These regulations make consignors, packers, loaders and customers, in addition to the drivers and transport suppliers, legally accountable for offences that they have contributed to, or encouraged. Although chain of responsibility does not currently apply to light vehicle fleets, it sends a clear message to organisations that require their staff, or those of their contractors and sub-contractors, to drive for work purposes.

Organisations operating light vehicles have legal obligations and a duty of care, under Department of Labour occupational health and safety regulations. These obligations are to provide a safe and healthy workplace, including the safe operation of all vehicle types (including trucks, buses, vans, four wheel drives and cars). Legally, vehicles are considered as part of the workplace in the New Zealand jurisdiction. The Health and Safety in Employment Act, 1992, is the reference statute [HSE]. Its 2002 amendment establishes the generic provision that a vehicle may be regarded as a place of work. This means that there is a requirement to ensure ways they are used do provide a working environment that is safe, and has minimal risk to health. To date, however, this has not been strongly enforced because the Department of Labour has not treated occupational driving as a priority. This may be about to change, however, as the Department of Labour appears to be focusing more attention on transport and there have been increasing calls for work-related road safety to be managed under an occupational health and safety framework by the Department of Labour. This trend is also emerging in the UK, USA and Australia.

Cost factors

The cost implications of work-related road incidents can be massive, with increases occurring in insurance costs, ambulance-chasing and personal injury costs. Workplace injury costs are met 40 percent by

the employee, 30 percent by the employer and 30 percent by the community as a whole.

One company recently had damage costs of \$3 million per year. Its hidden costs were approximately as much again and its return on sales figure was 8 percent. This meant that just to pay for the \$3 million of 'metal bashing costs' it had to generate \$75 million in revenues. Over four years this equates to \$12 million in bent metal, \$24 million in total costs and \$300 million in revenues required in order to pay for it.

Workshop participants gave the following reasons for taking a proactive approach to work-related road safety, 'protecting employees and reducing at-work vehicle crashes being a priority': 'safer driving leads to safer culture, reduces risks - for employers and employees', 'moral responsibility', 'keeps/helps attract employees', 'reduction in downtime, costs savings, legal requirements', 'client safety', 'brand image', 'right thing to do' and 'safety trends'.

Other participants highlighted reasons why they felt work-related road safety is not a priority in New Zealand: 'waiting for clear legislation', 'inconsequential issue compared to making a living', 'lack of enforcement', 'costs too much', 'ignorance of benefits', 'vehicles are insured', 'time restraints', 'vehicles have lots of safety features', 'we're not big enough', 'waste of time', 'we're too big', 'casual workers cause the problems', 'apathy', 'it's the driver's responsibility - not the organisations', 'other road users' and 'lack of infrastructure'. This is useful information for government policy agencies to work with.

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