

Submission

No 33

DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION

Organisation: Road Safety Education Limited
Name: Mr Greg Cantwell
Position: Director of Policy & Research
Date Received: 4/05/2012

Mr Bjarne Nordin
Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
26th March 2012

Dear Mr Nordin

Re: Staysafe Committee Submission

Please find attached a submission to the NSW Staysafe Committee regarding Driver Distraction. This submission was developed by a small group of 3rd year communication students from the University of Newcastle with input from Road Safety Education Limited.

This partnership represents Road Safety Education's commitment to working with young people to have them engage in the road safety education policy debate. Accordingly, we are pleased to append our name to this submission

Yours sincerely

Greg Cantwell
Director of Policy & Research

To: Bjarne Nordin
Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Enclosed is our submission to the Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety) entitled 'Driver Distraction: how education is key'. This submission has been prepared in response to the fifth Term of Reference in the Staysafe inquiry; *other solutions to reduce information overload for road users*. The submission proposes that education is a key solution to reduce driver distraction, particularly in young drivers aged 16-18 years old. Three areas have been discussed, which are; the importance of education, reasons enforcement alone does not work, and types of education.

Recommendations made include, a targeted publicity campaign, review of the "Switch off before you drive off" campaign conducted throughout the UK. Integration of driver distraction awareness into school road safety programs and an advertising campaign warning drivers about the dangers of being distracted.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions or comments regarding this submission.

Prepared by Michelle Iacono, Amie Paroissien, Mia Zeltins, Jiayu Queek and Sarah O'Donovan, University of Newcastle (B Communication 3rd Year),

Submitted *on behalf of*: Road Safety Education Limited

Driver and Road User Distraction Inquiry – Staysafe (Road Safety) Committee

Distracted Driving: how education is key

Prepared by Michelle Iacono, Amie Paroissien, Mia Zeltins, Jiayu Queek and Sarah O'Donovan, University of Newcastle University of Newcastle (B Comm 3rd Year), *on behalf of:*

Road Safety Education Limited

April 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), every year there are nearly 1.3 deaths and 50 million injuries as a result of road traffic crashes (2011, p.5). These occurrences have immeasurable effects on not only victims, but also on families and communities. While road traffic injuries affect all age groups, there is a prominent concentration amongst the young with, according to WHO, road traffic instances being “the leading cause of death worldwide among those aged 15-29 years” (2011,p.5). It is in response to these tragic figures that triggered the formation of Road Safety Education Limited (RSE). A not-for-profit organisation that works with young people aged 16-18 to deliver practical road safety information to change attitudes and raise awareness through the RYDA Road Safety Education program.

RSE was established in 2001 and since then over 175,000 students have attended the RYDA Program in NSW alone. In Australia and New Zealand over 250,000 have attended the Program. Each year, 50,000 attend a RYDA Program Day.

This submission has been prepared in response to the fifth Term of Reference in the Staysafe inquiry; *other solutions to reduce information overload for road users*. From our research we have found that there needs to be a balance between enforcement of road rules and education concerning the negative consequences of driver distraction. It is also our view that more should be done in terms of disseminating information about driver distraction and it's role in road incidences. This submission will focus on education as a solution to Driver distraction by addressing the areas of:

- Reasons enforcement alone does not work,
- The importance of education, and
- Types of education

2. BACKGROUND

Research shows that driver distraction in Australia and internationally is an important issue for road safety and is becoming a growing concern amongst policy-makers. According to Nevile and Haddington (2010) studies show distraction as a contributing factor in 12-21% of road traffic crashes, with drivers frequently engaging in distracting behaviour while driving (p.1). Nevile and Haddington define driver distraction as occurring when;

“a driver is delayed in the recognition of information necessary...to safely maintain the lateral and longitudinal control of the vehicle...due to some event, activity, object or person, within or outside the vehicle” (2010, p.5).

Most research in this area is concerned with mobile phone use; however the extent of this problem is much larger. WHO identifies four major types of driver distraction;

- Visual e.g. looking away from the road;
- Cognitive e.g. focusing on conversation rather than analysing the road situation;
- Physical e.g. taking hands off the wheel to operate a device; and
- Auditory e.g. responding to a ringing device or levels of music/radio inside the vehicle.

According to Eby and Kostyniuk (2003) types of distractions can be identified in two groups; in vehicle and outside of vehicle distractions. In vehicle distractions are those such as:

- Passengers,
- Adjusting entertainment system,
- Music,
- Mobile phone use,
- Global positioning systems (GPS) use,
- Eating or drinking,

- Adjusting vehicle controls, and
- Smoking

Outside of vehicle distractions are those such as:

- Exterior incidents e.g. police activity, crashes, vehicle actions and pedestrians; and
- Looking at scenery/landmarks e.g. billboards and other forms of roadside advertising.

In New South Wales it is currently illegal to drive while using a mobile phone without a hands-free device. Under the Graduated Licensing Scheme, using a mobile phone with, or without a hands-free device is illegal for all L and P1 plate drivers. It is also illegal for P1 plate drivers to carry more than one passenger between 11pm and 5am (Transport Roads and Maritime Services, 2012). While these laws positively promote a distraction free environment for young drivers, this issue is still largely under represented in terms of focus in education for young drivers.

3. REASONS ENFORCEMENT (OF TRAFFIC LAWS) ALONE DOES NOT WORK

This section discusses several reasons for the inadequacy of solely enforcing traffic laws against drivers, based on a review of available literature on traffic law enforcement in Australia and other countries.

Mäkinen et al. (2002) noted that directed intensive campaigns that aim to punish drivers for traffic offences often only result in short-term increases in compliance. According to them, there is also no difference between punishments delivered on the spot and that which is imposed after a delay of a few weeks. They cite a Finnish experiment in which the issuance of speeding tickets was not found to be more effective than sending warning letters by post (the long-term effects of these two penalties was also found to be less significant). These observations

therefore, firmly establish the idea that enforcement and punishment only work in the short term. As such, the maintenance of a long-term effect requires continuous upkeep of a dedicated traffic law enforcement unit and hence, by extension, will be a consistent drain on scarce police resources that also have to respond to incidents of criminality, violence, and environmental problems (Mäkinen et al., 2002; Zaal, 1994).

Secondly, Ferrante (2003) reports the sole application of punitive penalties on drivers will not always be effective since a significant proportion of traffic re-offenders exist. She links this to what is known as the “experiential effect”, where those who engage in illegal activity continue to do so because they learn that there is a low probability of getting caught. From a law-enforcement perspective, the solution would then be to increase police presence but this would again tax police resources as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The final point in this section revolves around public perception of traffic law enforcement activities. For example, in Ferrante’s (2003) study of disqualified drivers in Western Australia, focus group participants felt that the police were seen to be enforcing the letter, rather than the spirit, of the law. This can be seen as resistance to traditional methods of enforcement and sanction, or the “stick” portion of the “carrot and stick” approach.

In summary, pure enforcement of traffic laws is likely to be ineffective on the grounds of its short-term effectiveness, drain on police resources, the peculiarities of human behaviour and possible negative public perceptions. While this committee (Staysafe)’s report in 2008 (Staysafe Committee, 2008) raised the point of a perceived lack of police enforcement on rural roads as a catalyst for risky driving behaviours, an extensive, nationwide driver behaviour monitoring system that would guarantee improved compliance rates would definitely face strong public resistance (Mäkinen et al., 2002). Thus, while traffic law enforcement does play a part in ensuring road safety, it must work hand-in-hand with education (especially so for young drivers, for they lack experience on the

roads) to bring about a holistic development in road safety standards and thus a reduction in cases of driver distraction.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Distraction is an inevitable fact of being human, however it is erroneous to assume driver distraction cannot be minimised. The key is to teach 'safety mindedness,' where drivers develop their skills in conjunction with understanding what's considered risky road behaviour. There is evidence that young drivers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of driver distraction (Regan, 2007). Young drivers haven't yet become naturalised to driving tasks therefore are incredibly vulnerable in overseeing competing tasks.

It is demonstrated that P1 drivers are at a higher risk of injury within the first few months of driving. There are a number of factors which contribute to crash occurrence due to distraction (Mcevoy et al., 2006); the proportion of drivers who engage in the activity, the frequency and duration of time driver's spend on the distraction, as well as the relative risk occurred by it. Despite the noted risk of mobile phone use while driving, there are a number of other risky elements young adults should be aware of when driving.

According to a study conducted by McEvoy (2006) the top three distracting activities for NSW drivers are:

- Lack of concentration (71.8%),
- An outside person, object or event (57.8%) and
- Talking to passengers (39.8%).

The study cross compared these findings with a driver perception test which asked participants to rank various distractions and risky behaviours in order from most to least dangerous. According to the study 90% of participants believed writing a text message while driving was very dangerous however ranked the top two most distracting activities as moderately dangerous and did not consider talking to passengers to be very dangerous (McEvoy,2006). It can be concluded

from this study that there is a lack of knowledge concerning the dangers of driver distraction beyond the use of mobile phones. A new strategy should include compulsory information in driver education programs that would aim to raise awareness amongst NSW drivers.

It is especially important young adults from the age of 16 are given the knowledge to make the right choices before they are given their provisional license. Practical knowledge such as stopping distances, wheel checks and hazard perception tests combined with developing emotional intelligence such as understanding the perspective of police officers and/or crash survivors will help combat the issue of driver distraction and further eliminate the occurrence of accidents.

5. TYPES OF EDUCATION

Reducing the potential harm caused by driver distraction will require the development and implementation of an effective public education campaign. There are a number of effective ways in which to educate road users about road safety. Most commonly used types of public education include advertising, websites, licensing tests and road safety education programs. Apart from the work of RSE, there is limited education in NSW about driver distraction.

a) Social Marketing

Social Marketing is an effective way of creating awareness with a large segment of the population. Advertising can be in many forms, such as print, television and radio advertising.

In NSW, the Transport Roads and Maritime Service (RMS) (previously known as the Roads and Traffic Authority) currently have nine advertising campaigns underway relating to road safety.

An independent survey commissioned by the RTA into the “Pinkie” Campaign

which was created to heighten awareness about the issue of speeding and help to make speeding socially unacceptable found that “69 per cent of the general population, and 70 per cent of young male drivers, believed the campaign to have some effect in encouraging young male drivers to obey the speed limit” (RTA, 2012). With overall respondents stating that they “believed the campaign increased community awareness about speeding and understood the campaign’s clear anti-speeding message” (RTA, 2012). Therefore a new strategy should include an advertising campaign to raise awareness amongst drivers of the effect of driver distraction and ways to reduce or eliminate possible distractions.

b) Safety education programs

RSE operates the RYDA Program aimed at dealing with attitude and awareness concerning road safety rather than a technical lesson on driving. One aim of the program is to equip young people with the knowledge they need to stay safe on Australian roads, particularly at the age when they are starting to drive or riding in cars driven by friends.

c) Licensing Testing

The graduated licensing system stages driving to begin with situations that involve relatively low risk and then gradually introduce beginner drivers to more complex (riskier) situations as they gain more experience and as maturity increases (Young Driver Fact Base, 2012). This system is effective and is important as people aged 17- 25 represent less than 15% of the population yet account for around one quarter of deaths and injuries on Australian roads. Having compulsory completion of a safety education program as part of this graduated licensing system would ensure both technical aspects of driving along with attitudes and awareness are addressed for all new drivers.

6. CONCLUSION

Driver distraction is an important, if not overlooked issue on both a national and global scale, becoming an area of great concern for policy-makers. While current legislation seeks to manage only one type of distraction i.e. the mobile phone and promote a distraction free environment, there is still a great need to focus on other forms of distraction such as GPS, adjusting entertainment systems or adjusting vehicle controls. Many young drivers have yet to become “naturalised” to driving tasks, and thus, are incredibly vulnerable in overseeing competing tasks.

The key to overcoming this is education, teaching new drivers “safety mindedness” so they can not only develop their motor skills but also understand the consequences of risky behaviour. If there is to be any change in young driver behaviour, education must be at the centre, pure law enforcement alone is not enough with statistics within the last 10 years showing punishing drivers with the issuing of a fine for example, often only results in short-term increases in compliance (Mäkinen, 2002).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Appropriate government funding for initiatives to reduce driver distraction and include

- 1) Integrate driver distraction awareness into school road safety education programs
- 2) Targeted publicity campaign educating drivers on what exactly driver distraction is, providing them with a clear and specific definition.
- 3) In considering the approach to be taken in educating the public on the dangers of text and video messaging or engaging in highly- emotional or complex phone conversations while driving, we recommend the State government review the Switch off before you drive off campaign conducted throughout the UK.
- 4) Engage in an advertising campaign warning drivers about the dangers of being distracted by 'everyday' things, and reinforce the importance of remaining alert and focused whilst driving.

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