



By Bev Brock, patron of Fatality Free Friday

Date: Friday, 28 May 2010

Taking small steps for big action on road trauma

Yesterday was Fatality Free Friday, a day with a big ambition – no fatalities on Australia’s roads for 24 hours.

As anyone who knows me is aware, road safety has been a passionate cause of mine, and was one of Peter’s too, over many, many years. And it goes even further than that – I’m striving for the acknowledgement that road safety is the responsibility of every individual.

It’s easy to look at the number of lives lost on our roads and say ‘someone’ - and by that most people mean ‘the government’ - should do something about it.

It’s an unfortunate attitude to have because ‘the government’ or ‘the authorities’ are not behind the wheel. We are. And that’s where attitudes need to change and acknowledgement of our responsibility as road users needs to be made.

Great strides have been made in reducing the road toll in Australia already but it’s worth looking at the past if only to remind us that government and vehicle manufacturers can only do so much.

Over the past 40 years, the road toll has dropped from 35 per 100,000 of population to about eight per 100,000 today. This is due to the introduction of Australian Design Rules for vehicles, the first of which was mandatory seatbelts, then general improvements in vehicle safety, and road design and construction.

Now it’s time to look at the human factor.

A lot of people ask me: “Why Fatality Free Friday? Why focus on one day?” The answer is simple. If we can make one day fatality free on Australia’s roads, not through happenstance but as a result of all road users being conscious of their own actions and alert to potential hazards, then it is the beginning of a habit that stops crashes and other road trauma incidents from happening every day.



Of course no one goes looking for a crash, but they also don't go out deliberately looking to avoid one either.

It doesn't matter how exceptional a driver you are, if you fail; to heed the warning signs or lose concentration, you simply become another statistic and your loved ones are left in pain.

Many - possibly the majority - of drivers get from place to place not actively 'driving' but doing a range of other things at the same time. Things like talking on the mobile phone or rummaging in the console for a CD are obvious issues.

The spilt bottle of drink, the shopping falling off the seat or the crying child are not good enough reasons to become distracted and cause an outcome that can be truly disastrous.

However, we also allow ourselves to be distracted from the task we should be concentrating on by such things as mentally planning the day ahead, interacting with passengers or looking at the scenery.

Driving a vehicle – a car, truck, motorbike, bicycle - is not just about pushing pedals and changing gears. Of central importance is mental attitude and being alert to potentially dangerous situations unfolding before us.

Attitude is everything.

Certainly, genuine accidents cannot be stopped. But, in fact, very few crashes are genuinely 'accidental'. They usually involve some degree of warning or lack of preparedness on the part of drivers that might have alleviated the situation.

Fatalities Free Friday is Australia's only community-based national road safety campaign. It was developed by Queensland road safety advocate, author and media commentator Russell White in 2007 who saw an opportunity for individuals, community organisations, companies and governments to stand together.

There are now individuals in cities and towns right across Australia using Fatalities Free Friday as the springboard to address road safety issues in their community.

Community groups such as Playgroup Australia and Kidsafe use Fatalities Free Friday to remind parents of the importance of correctly fitted child car restraints and to highlight the tragic consequences of slow speed run-overs on driveways and streets.



Companies are using Fatalities Free Friday to emphasise to mutual workplace health and safety responsibilities.

Governments at all levels are using Fatalities Free Friday to announce initiatives and programs.

Bringing communities together in a common cause is how we make a difference.

Road safety is everyone's responsibility and everyone's opportunity. And that is the reason I'm proud to be patron of Fatalities Free Friday.

#ends

For further information

Jacqui Carling-Rodgers
Business Communications Management
Phone: 0414 282 048
E-mail: Jacqui@bcm-online.com.au