

MEDIA RELEASE

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ROAD SAFETY EXPERTS IMPLORE URGENT FOCUS ON ROAD SAFETY TO DRIVE DOWN DEATHS

Shocking new research indicates an alarming level of ignorance and arrogance towards road safety

While 99 per cent of Australians claim to be safe road users, 71 per cent are breaking road laws¹ - the juxtaposition spotlighting an urgent need to give road safety a renewed national focus.

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) has issued the plea to road users today, as it released its annual research report to launch Fatality Free Friday.

Even with our highest populated areas under extended periods of lockdowns last year, a total of 1,127 people were killed on Australian roads, which was a three per cent increase on the year prior.²

The ARSF road safety plea is not just directed at drivers but all road users, as the research unveiled the worst offenders for breaking road laws were cyclists (81%), skateboarders (80%), pedestrians (78%) and motorcyclists (77%), before drivers and scooterists (76%).

According to the research, the top two reasons for breaking a road rule was a belief it was safe to do so, and simply not being focused on the road (37% and 36% respectively).

Lack of focus was the biggest issue for drivers (38%), whereas it was cyclists who were most guilty of simply believing it was safe to break road laws (44%).

ARSF founder and CEO, Russell White, said the research had raised a number of red flags, demonstrating a frightening degree of complacency when it came to using the road.

“Just over half of Australians say they’ve taken a risk on the road (54%), and yet we have a significantly higher portion who are breaking laws (71%) - laws that have been put in place for safety,” Mr White said.

“This isn’t just about you as an individual, but all the people around you whose lives you put in jeopardy every time you fail to focus on road safety,”

“We cannot afford to be complacent when the price is somebody’s life,” he said.

The research also indicated further road safety ignorance in the fact that 6 in 10 road users defined it as simply obeying road rules; dismissing the role of taking personal responsibility to prevent injury or death.

¹ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of Australian Road Safety Foundation between 2-8 March 2022 with a sample size of n=1,503 adults aged 18+ years

² Deaths in Australia, Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (accessed 14 Jan)

Furthermore, the focus has continued to slip in the wake of the pandemic, with almost a third (32%) admitting that they've become more concerned with health matters than with road safety.

The ARSF were concerned by drivers' lack of focus, given how quickly a road crash can happen and how prevalent risky behaviour was amongst the nation's drivers.

Specifically, the research showed that almost two thirds (63%) of drivers admit to speeding, and more than a third (35%) drive fatigued.

The research confirmed that distractedness continues to be a prevalent road risk. In fact, 62% of Australian drivers admit to distracted driving activities, with the most common including talking on the phone (34%), looking away to change music or radio (29%), and looking away to use GPS (29%).

One of the less talked about, but equally dangerous, acts of eating while driving was admitted to by more than half of Australian drivers (56%), and worryingly, almost 3 in 10 (29%) said they could not be persuaded to change this behaviour, even if it were made illegal.

The ARSF hoped this research would spotlight the need for all road users to take personal responsibility for the unacceptably high numbers of people losing their lives on the nation's roads.

It was a sentiment echoed by Nigel and Jody Smith, whose 17-year-old son Lachlan was tragically killed in a road crash this year, and are bravely campaigning against poor choices on the road.

"He had such a life ahead of him, and now that's gone. No parent should have to lose a child like this, but the impact of this goes beyond us and his sister, his friends and our local community are completely devastated" Mr Smith said.

"We just want to stop this from happening to anyone else. Our young people need better education earlier on in life and they need to know that these reckless choices in the name of fun, or even just carelessness, have lifelong consequences for you and those around you,"

"Please, for our son Lachlan (known to his friends as Schmitt) slow down, pay attention, and choose safety when you're on the road" he said.

The road safety authority will be driving this message home over the next month as it campaigns towards Fatality Free Friday, a national day of action now in its 15th year, with the support of sponsors such as Suncorp Insurance.

As one of Australia's largest insurers, Suncorp Insurance sees first-hand the life-changing impacts of distracted driving behaviours. Matt Pearson, Executive General Manager, CTP Insurance Suncorp (including brands AAMI, GIO and Apia) said: "We partner with the Australian Road Safety Foundation to help encourage safer driving behaviours. Unfortunately, we know all too well the impact road accidents can have on injured road users and their family, friends and communities.

Our message to road users is simple – even a short trip to the shops can be disastrous so don't become complacent while behind the wheel. Road safety is a responsibility we should all carry and whether you drive, ride, cycle or walk, it's vital to focus your full attention on the road, and drive to the conditions."

Fatality Free Friday operates on the belief that if we can go one day without a death on the road, we can demonstrate the impact a focus on road safety can have each and every day of the year - ultimately saving thousands and thousands of lives.

Road users in support of Fatality Free Friday can make an individual pledge to focus on road safety by visiting arsf.com.au

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About Australian Road Safety Foundation:

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to improving road safety awareness, enhancing driver education and reducing the impact of road trauma. The Foundation strives to improve road safety outcomes, develop research and education programs and work to inform policy makers on methods to address road safety issues. It also provides an umbrella organisation for other road safety programs and community groups. ARSF is helping to develop a sustainable strategy for reducing the social and economic costs of road crashes, as well as providing a platform for future research and advocacy programs.