

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 00:01 on Friday, 2 September 2022

NEW RESEARCH: ALL ROAD USERS NEEDED TO FIX ALARMING ISSUE OF RURAL ROAD CRASHES

Lethal combination of bad behaviour and unpreparedness is fuelling high risk in rural areas

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) has released new research highlighting the joint responsibility of both metro and rural residents to address the shocking disparity of rural road deaths.

Despite less than a third of Australia's population residing outside major cities¹, deaths on rural roads accounted for almost two thirds (65%) of last year's road toll². Specifically, of the 1,122 recorded fatalities, 730 occurred on rural roads, and 392 in major cities.

As part of its Rural Road Safety Month launch, ARSF has released new research that demonstrates that the alarming rural road safety issue is a matter for both local and metro drivers.

The report findings highlighted the high rate that rural roads are utilised by both driver groups and exhibited a concerning disregard for safety while doing so.

More than a third of Australian drivers are using rural roads at least once a week, with an additional 4 in 10 (42%) doing so multiple times a year.³

What's more, this volume of rural traffic is set to climb. The research confirmed that 85 per cent of Australians are planning a road trip in the next year, and more than half of these (54%) are planning multiple trips.

ARSF Founder and CEO Russell White said the most concerning piece of research was the number of respondents who admitted to unpreparedness and bad behaviour when driving in rural areas, a combination he believes is lethal.

"On one hand, the research is showing a shocking lack of resilience, which is essential on rural roads, along with very lax attitudes towards being safe in these high risk environments," Mr White said.

"Along with 6 in 10 drivers not making sure their vehicles are safe for a road trip, there's a very clear issue with drivers being completely vulnerable to dangerous driving conditions that are often more prevalent in regional areas."

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features1132016>

² Australian Government, Australian Road Deaths Database: https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/ongoing/road_deaths_australia_monthly_bulletins

³ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of Australian Road Safety Foundation to a sample size of n=1512 Australians 18 years and over who currently hold a drivers licence

According to the research, almost 9 in 10 (88%) road trippers are unprepared for what to do if faced with a dangerous weather event, while 8 in 10 don't prepare an alternative route for possible road closures.

“Unbelievably, more than 4 in 10 (45%) don't even check the weather forecast before hitting the road for a long distance drive in rural areas,” Mr White said.

“When you look further into the research, it would also appear that drivers who live in metro areas, those least familiar with the dangers of rural roads, are the most guilty of being unprepared,” he said.

In fact, metro residents are *less* likely than regional residents to ensure their car is safe for the road trip, to map out fuel stops, check upcoming weather, ensure their roadside assistance is up to date, and have a plan in place for if their car breaks down.

Metro residents are more likely than regional residents to drive more dangerously on rural roads, specifically - slipping into bad habits such as speeding, driving fatigued and breaking road rules simply because they believe they are less likely to get caught or hit something.

This bad behaviour, however, was not exclusive to metro residents, with all Australian drivers demonstrating poor attitudes towards their personal responsibility to protect lives on rural roads.

The research showed that 4 in 10 drivers admit they are *more* dangerous on regional, rural or remote roads. The most prevalent behaviours are driving fatigued (61%), speeding (37%), and using a mobile phone (11%).

The main reasons that drivers are more likely to break a road rule when in rural areas were revealed as believing it was safe to do so (21%), being distracted (14%) and simply trusting they won't get caught by police (6%).

Rural Road Safety Month is a national community-based road safety initiative that runs across September. The event, now in its sixth year, is designed to educate all road users on the additional risks of rural roads and engage them in changing behaviours to actively reduce the burden of road trauma.

Suncorp's Executive General Manager of Compulsory Third Party (CTP) Insurance Matt Pearson said Rural Road Safety Month was a timely reminder for all road users to take an extra moment to avoid disaster on regional roads.

“Every day our team witness the impact road trauma has on our customers and our regional communities, which is why we are backing action.

“Safe roads are critical to keeping our regional and rural communities great places to live, visit and work – so I encourage all road users to prepare for every regional trip and remain vigilant not just throughout this month, but well after the campaign finishes,” Mr Pearson said.

Throughout Rural Road Safety Month, individuals, businesses, and community organisations are encouraged to share information, host local events, and make a promise to be the change they want to see on rural roads and to #chooseroadsafety not just across the month, but 365 days of the year.

For further information visit: <https://arsf.com.au/rural-road-safety-month/>

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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.