

2023 Rural Road Safety Month

National Fact Sheet

The Australian rural road toll is cause for statewide concern:

- Despite fewer than a third of Australia's population residing outside major cities¹, deaths on rural roads accounted for almost two thirds of last year's road toll².
- In fact, of the 1,188 Australian road deaths across the last 12 months, 773 (65%) occurred on rural roads compared to 415 (35%) that were recorded in metropolitan areas.

New research from the Australian Road Safety Foundation³ (ARSF) has revealed a clear driver disregard for safety on regional roads.

- Over half (51%) of Australian drivers openly admit to breaking road rules when travelling on rural roads, slipping into bad habits like:
 - Driving over the speed limit (41%)
 - Using a mobile phone behind the wheel (13%)
 - Crossing a double line (11%)
- The main reasons that drivers are more likely to break a road rule when in rural areas:
 - Believing it was safe to do so (27%)
 - Being distracted (19%)
 - Trusting they won't get caught by police or cameras (9%)

Equally concerning is the revelation that drivers are struggling to concentrate due to fatigue.

- Despite almost two thirds (58%) of drivers taking a trip on a regional road each month, driver fatigue is reaching new levels, with one quarter (25%) of rural drivers struggling to maintain focus due to fatigue.
- What's more, despite two fifths of Australians (42%) planning rest breaks during their journey, a fifth (17%) felt fatigued but pushed on in an effort to reach their destination sooner.
- Additionally, one in 10 drivers (10%) have experienced terrifying moments of microsleep, where they were awake but unable to recall driving.

¹ Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare, accessed 29 June 2023 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health>

² Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communication, BITRE Road Deaths Database, accessed 29 June 2023

³ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of the Australian Road Safety Foundation, June 2023, n=1005 nationally representative by gender, age and location of Australian drivers aged 18 years and over

The research also raises cause for concern that road trippers' unpreparedness is putting lives at risk.

- Road trippers are not ensuring that their vehicle can safely go the journey:
 - Almost two thirds (58%) didn't put their car in for a service before hitting the road
 - More than six in 10 (61%) do not have fuel stops planned out
- Rural drivers also demonstrate lack of resilience if faced with unexpected dangers:
 - More than 4 in 10 (42%) don't check the weather forecast ahead of their trip
 - Almost 9 in 10 (88%) don't have a plan for what to do if faced with an extreme weather event
 - Additionally, almost 8 in 10 (79%) haven't planned for what to do if their car breaks down
- This unpreparedness is despite more than 6 in 10 drivers (66%) experiencing some form of dangerous situation while on rural roads in the past. In fact:
 - More than one third (38%) have had a warning light appear, broken down or run out of fuel while road tripping
 - 3 in 10 (32%) have faced unexpected road closures
 - Almost 3 in 10 (31%) have faced dangerous weather conditions

Australian drivers recognise that education and awareness is critical as more drivers hit the road in regional areas:

- An overwhelming majority (82%) are intending to take at least one road trip on rural roads in the next 12 months
- Nearly half (46%) believe more road safety education is needed to prevent tragedies from occurring

The research also revealed a number of alarming insights including a rise in road aggression combined with continued bad behaviour and a decline in common road etiquette such as the 'thank you wave'⁴.

- 97 per cent of Australian road users believed a simple 'thank you wave' could contribute to improved road safety
- Half (50%) believe this symbolic gesture of road kindness was on a sharp decline across the country

About Australian Road Safety Foundation:

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to improving road safety and reducing the rates of death and the mental and physical injuries that result from road crashes. It achieves this through innovative road safety awareness programs, education, advocacy, research and community engagement.

⁴ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of Australian Road Safety Foundation between 3-9 March 2022 with a sample size of n=1,016 adults aged 18 years and over