

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 1 August 2026 at 12:01am AEST

WISH YOU WERE HERE: URGENT PLEA FOR THE 906 PEOPLE WHO NEVER MADE IT HOME

New research indicates human behaviour is to blame for rising rural road deaths

New research¹ from the Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) has exposed a deadly false sense of safety on Australia's country roads, where 906 people were killed last year - a 10.5 per cent rise in just twelve months².

Released to mark Rural Road Safety Month, held this August, the research lays bare the human factor behind the statistics: a widespread and misplaced confidence that regional roads are forgiving, which is continuing to cost lives unnecessarily.

This is a confidence not borne out by reality: while more than a quarter of drivers (27%) think rural roads are safer than city streets, the fact that more than two in every three road deaths (69%) happen in regional areas paints a very different - and stark - picture.

ARSF's research places the responsibility squarely on human behaviour and the choices made on and around the road. The data showed that more than half of all Australian drivers (53%) admit to breaking a road rule on a country road.

But most alarming is the 'why' - the number one excuse for these poor choices was simply that they believed it was safe to do so (35%), well ahead of distraction (19%) or fatigue (17%).

On country roads, speeding was the most common offence (36%), followed by driving while fatigued (21%) and using a mobile phone (15%). And it was often on the most relaxed of journeys, with rule-breaking most common during holiday and recreational travel (23%) and trips to visit friends and family (21%) - the very journeys meant to bring people together.

Complacency went hand in hand with unpreparedness, too. Ahead of longer trips (2+ hours), more than 6 in 10 drivers (63%) fail to plan their fuel or where to refuel, almost 6 in 10 (58%) don't check that their vehicle is fit to drive, and over half (53%) don't even check the weather forecast.

¹ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of the Australian Road Safety Foundation between 29 May – 9 June 2026 with a sample size of n=1506 adults aged 18+ years with a current driver's licence.

² Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, Annual Road Deaths Database. Accessed May 2026.



And while that may make city drivers seem to be most at fault, it was local country drivers who admitted to the most dangerous habits. Regional residents are more likely to speed in regional areas than those who live in the city (45% compared to 30%), and also more likely to get behind the wheel tired (25% versus 19%).

Founder and Chair of ARSF, Russell White, said every driver, everywhere, had a part to play in preventing more deaths and debilitating injuries on regional roads.

“Make no mistake, the majority of crashes come down to human fault - whether you live in the city, the regions or the bush, every single road user makes choices that can have deadly consequences,” Mr White said.

“And it’s not just reckless, high-risk driving. The majority of rural crashes happen in broad daylight, on an ordinary weekday, in a single vehicle - on the kind of everyday drive every one of us makes.”

“Every one of those 906 people killed on rural roads last year was heading somewhere - a father picking up a child from school, a daughter heading to the movies, a partner popping out to grab milk. Our job this Rural Road Safety Month is to make sure more journeys end where they’re meant to,” Mr White said.

The research shows the most powerful motivator for change is also a human one: knowing they could stop someone else from reaching their family and friends would prompt almost half of all drivers (48%) to take greater care behind the wheel.

For Renee Ernst, those numbers are devastatingly personal. In December 2024, her husband, Troy, was driving home from work near Gunnedah (NSW) when a truck allegedly drifted onto the wrong side of the road and collided with his car. He never made it home.

“Troy was just coming home from work, the way he had a thousand times before. He had a destination, and it was us,” Renee Ernst said.

“You never imagine it will be your family until it is. Every time someone takes a risk on the road, they are gambling with someone’s whole world.”

“I owe it to Troy to keep his name alive - and for his legacy to be that his story spares another family from waiting for someone who never walks back through the door,” Ms Ernst said.

The ARSF research also showed that initiatives like Rural Road Safety Month do help create change. When it came to ways to improve driver behaviour, the most effective prompts were reading or hearing



Australian
Road Safety
Foundation

www.arsf.com.au
1300 723 843



about serious crashes in the news (34%), seeing roadside memorials and community tributes (32%), and road safety campaigns across TV, radio and online (28%).

Rural Road Safety Month is once again proudly supported by AAMI, continuing a long-standing partnership with ARSF. As one of the nation's largest CTP insurers, AAMI sees the human aftermath of road trauma every day and has long backed the work of changing the behaviours behind it.

"Behind every road fatality is a person who should have made it home," Michelle Bain, AAMI's Executive General Manager of CTP Insurance and Advocacy, said.

"When a life is lost on a rural road, the impact is felt across entire communities. Families, friends, workplaces and towns all carry the consequences."

"That's why AAMI is proud to support the Australian Road Safety Foundation and Rural Road Safety Month, helping remind Australians that every choice behind the wheel matters, because every journey deserves a safe ending."

This Rural Road Safety Month, the ARSF is calling on all road users to Join the Journey - making a personal promise to choose road safety, hosting or taking part in a community or private event, and helping to kickstart cultural change by sharing the free education assets available at arsf.com.au.

For more information and to join the conversation, follow ARSF on Instagram (@ausroadsafety), Facebook (@fatalityfreefriday) and LinkedIn (@[Australian Road Safety Foundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/australian-road-safety-foundation)).

- ENDS -

Media Contacts:

Frances Milvydas | frances@inthemaking.com.au | 0431 296 499

Courtney Trewin on behalf of ARSF | courtney@inthemaking.com.au | 0420 211 251

About the Australian Road Safety Foundation:

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving road safety outcomes 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.



Australian
Road Safety
Foundation

www.arsf.com.au
1300 723 843