ROSPA

accidents don't have to happen

Road Safety: Essential Information for the Media

THINK! Road Safety

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Contents

Introduction

Each year in Great Britain more than 1,700 people are killed on the roads. A further 25,000 are seriously injured. The latest reported road casualty statistics, collected by the Department for Transport, can be found here. Around 90 per cent of these deaths and injuries involve human error, either in the form of careless and dangerous behaviour, or in the form of mistakes and misjudgements[1].

The media influences people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Social media, television, radio and print media constantly show people driving, riding and walking in all sorts of articles, posts, programmes and advertisements. These media outlets either show people using the road in a safe or unsafe way, and very often, it makes no difference to the storyline or characterisation.

This guide is written for journalists, writers, producers, directors and everyone else involved in producing social media content, films, television, radio programmes, news reports and any advertising media. It presents factual, topic-based road safety information with links to free supporting material for those seeking greater detail.

Positive images showing safe behaviour may help to prevent accidents and even save lives. Images showing poor or dangerous behaviour may, inadvertently, have the opposite effect. For example, a news item intended to highlight a road safety issue can give the opposite visual message if it shows a reporter driving while talking to a camera. In some cases, bad or dangerous behaviour on the road may be an integral part of the character or plot, meaning that showing safe practice is not feasible. However, glamourising dangerous behaviour should be avoided, and as far as possible, the consequences of dangerous behaviour should be shown.

Very often, checking minor details that in most cases will make little or no difference to your story, may make a big difference to a viewer or reader's attitude.

The Highway Code is a very good additional source of advice on safe road use. Further information on road safety issues can be accessed at www.rospa.com/road-safety/.

RoSPA Media Team

The RoSPA media team can be contacted on pressoffice@rospa.com, or 0121 248 2134/5.

The team is happy to provide statements, articles and statistics (where they exist).

[1] Department for Transport (2018) 'Reported Road Casualties Great Britain, annual report: 2017' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2017

Road Casualties

Each year, the Department for Transport publish an annual report including statistics on the reported road casualties in Great Britain. Most of the statistics are based on road accidents reported to the police (Stats19). These provide detailed statistics about personal injury road accidents, vehicles and casualties involved.

The long term trend in road casualties in reported road accidents was broadly level between 1979 and 1998, allowing for natural variation in the number of casualties. Between 1998 and 2010 the general trend in road casualties was downward.

However, the number of road deaths has levelled out since 2010. Since then, most of the annual changes are explained by one-off causes (for instance, the snow in 2010) or natural variation.

In 2018, there were:

- 1,784 people killed on Great Britain's roads
- 28,122 people seriously injured on Great Britain's roads
- 160,597 people injured in total on Great Britain's roads

The latest reported road casualty statistics, collected by the Department for Transport, can be found here.

Speed

In 2018, 177 people were killed in crashes involving someone exceeding the speed limit and a further 137 people died when someone was travelling too fast for the conditions[2].

Unfortunately, almost all drivers and motorcyclists use inappropriate speed at some point, either by exceeding the speed limit by driving too fast or by driving within the limit but too fast for the conditions, such as in poor weather and visibility.

The minimum penalty for speeding is a £100 fine and 3 points. Some drivers may be given the option to attend a speed awareness course to avoid having points added to their licence, if appropriate.

Drivers and riders who are travelling at inappropriate speeds are more likely to crash and their higher speed means that the crash will cause more severe injuries, to themselves and/or to other road users. Inappropriate speed also magnifies other driver errors, such as driving too close or driving when tired or distracted, multiplying the chances of these types of driving causing an accident.

For more information on speed, view our inappropriate speed factsheet.

[2] Department for Transport (2019) 'RAS50001: Contributory factors: reported accidents by severity, Great Britain' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras50-contributory-factors

Speed Cameras

The purpose of speed cameras is to change driver behaviour by discouraging them from exceeding the speed limit.

There are three main types of speed cameras: **fixed speed cameras, mobile cameras** and **average speed cameras**.

Fixed speed cameras are located at selected roadside sites, typically a yellow box on a grey pole. Usually, there are white markings on the road to help calculate vehicles' speed and give extra warning to drivers of the camera's presence. Signs in the area warn motorists that speed cameras are present.

In some areas, mobile camera vans are used at locations where there is a history of speed-related collisions. It is a myth that speed cameras are used as income generators and their use is strictly regulated.

Digital average speed cameras involve pairs of cameras, which are used to measure a vehicle's average speed along a clearly defined and accurately measured stretch of road. Automatic number plate recognition software is used to identify and record vehicles at the start and end of the enforced area of road with their entry and exit times, which, together with the known distance travelled, is used to calculate an average speed. If the vehicle is travelling faster than the pre-set threshold, its details and a colour image are digitally recorded. Digital cameras can send this information directly to a computer that generates the penalty notices.

Evidence shows that speed cameras are effective at reducing speeds and preventing accidents, especially in preventing collisions in which people are fatally or seriously injured.

For more information on speed cameras, view our speed cameras factsheet.

20mph Limits and Zones

20mph limits are areas where the speed limit has been reduced to 20mph but there are no physical measures to reduce vehicle speeds. Drivers are alerted to the speed limit with 20mph speed limit repeater signs. They are most appropriate for roads where average speeds are already low, and the guidance suggests below 24mph. the layout and use of the road must also give the clear impression that a 20mph speed or below is most appropriate. Where the speed limit changes it will always be signed.

20mph zones use traffic calming measures such as speed humps and chicanes in built-up areas where there are high volumes of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. The principle is that the traffic calming slows vehicles down to speeds below the limit, and in this way the zone becomes 'self-enforcing'. Speed humps, chicanes, road narrowing, planting and other measures can be introduced to both physically and visually reinforce the nature of the road.

The Department for Transport advises traffic authorities to keep their speed limits under review with changing circumstances, and to consider the introduction of more 20mph limits and zones, over time, in urban areas and built-up village streets that are primarily residential, to ensure greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

20mph speed limits are enforceable and offenders can be prosecuted when the limit is exceeded above a given threshold set by the Chief Constable for the area. Fixed penalty notices and prosecutions can be used, or in some cases, the offender may be offered a speed awareness course.

For more information on speed, view our 20mph limits and zones factsheet and our guide to 20mph limits.

Drink-Driving

The maximum blood alcohol limit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. In Scotland, the blood alcohol limit was reduced to 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood in 2014. In Northern Ireland, there are plans to lower the blood alcohol limit.

Drivers can be imprisoned, banned from driving and face a fine if found guilty of drink-driving. In certain instances it is possible to reduce the driving ban by taking a drink-drive rehabilitation course if the driver is banned from driving for 12 months or more. The penalty for causing death by dangerous driving under the influence of alcohol carries a maximum prison sentence of 14 years.

Alcohol slows reaction time, impairs judgement and substantially increases the risk of crashing. The legal drink-drive limit can be reached, and the risk of having a crash substantially increased, without a driver or rider feeling or appearing drunk. Even below the drink-driving limit, driving will be impaired.

Although the level of drink-driving has fallen dramatically over the last three decades, more than 200 people are still killed in drink-drive incidents every year. Despite 30 years of drink-drive education and enforcement, more than 40,000 people are still caught drink-driving annually.

For more information on drink-driving, view our drinking and driving factsheet.

Drug-Driving

In 2018 there were 1,321 incidents involving a driver impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal); 80 of these were fatal[3].

Drivers caught and convicted of drug-driving can receive a minimum 12-month driving ban, a criminal record and a fine of up to £5,000, or up to six months in prison, or both. The penalty for causing death by dangerous driving under the influence of drugs is carries a maximum prison sentence of 14 years.

It is now an offence to drive with any of 17 controlled drugs above a specified level in your blood. This includes illegal and medicinal drugs. The limit set for each drug is different, and for illegal drugs they are set extremely low, but have been set at a level to rule out any accidental exposure, for example, through passive smoking.

The police have a roadside test that makes it easier to detect those who are driving under the influence of illegal drugs. Officers can test for cannabis and cocaine at the roadside, and screen for other drugs including ecstasy, LSD, ketamine and heroin at the police station.

Driving under the influence of drugs is extremely dangerous and can affect driving skills in a number of ways, such as slower reaction time, an aggressive style of driving, distorted vision and fatigue that affects concentration.

[3] Department for Transport (2019) 'RAS50001: Contributory factors: reported accidents by severity, Great Britain' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras50-contributory-factors

Driver Distraction (Including Mobile Phones)

A driver is distracted when they pay attention to a second activity while driving. People cannot always safely multi-task in this way, especially if the second activity is time consuming or complex.

The secondary activity puts extra demands on the driver, which may reduce his or her driving standard. For example, it may cause the driver to become less observant or to make poor decisions about how to control the vehicle safely. The lower standard of driving means that a driver is more likely to fail to anticipate hazards, and means accidents can occur due to distraction.

Activities such as using a mobile phone (even hands-free), smoking a cigarette, interacting with the vehicle's media system, changing the satellite navigation system, and unwrapping and eating sweets have resulted in fatal accidents, and in drivers being prosecuted for careless or dangerous driving resulting in a fine and penalty points.

In 2018, there were 25 fatal incidents in which a driver was using a mobile phone, 68 when the driver was 'distracted by something in the vehicle', and a further 17 where the driver was 'distracted by something outside of the vehicle'[4].

For more information on driver distraction, view our driver distraction, mobile phones, headphones as a driving distraction and satellite navigation factsheets.

[4] Department for Transport (2019) 'RAS50001: Contributory factors: reported accidents by severity, Great Britain' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras50-contributory-factors

Fatigue

Driver fatigue is a serious problem resulting in many thousands of road accidents each year. It is not possible to calculate the exact number of sleep-related accidents, but research shows that driver fatigue may be a contributory factor in up to 20 per cent of road accidents, and up to one quarter of fatal and serious accidents.

Sleepiness reduces reaction times (a critical element of safe driving). It also reduces vigilance, alertness and concentration, so that the ability to perform attention-based activities (such as driving) is impaired. The speed at which information is processed is also reduced by sleepiness. The quality of decision-making may also be affected.

Crashes caused by tired drivers are most likely to happen:

- on long journeys on monotonous roads, such as motorways
- between 2am and 6am
- between 2pm and 4pm (especially after eating, or having even one alcoholic drink)
- after having less sleep than normal
- after drinking alcohol
- if taking medicines that cause drowsiness
- after long working hours or on journeys home after long shifts, especially night shifts.

For more information, take a look at our Driver Fatigue and Road Accidents factsheet.

Child Car Seats

The law requires that all children travelling in the front or rear of any car, van or goods vehicle must use the correct child car seat until they are either 135cm in height or 12-years-old (whichever they reach first). There are a few exceptions. After this, they must use an adult seatbelt.

The child must travel in an appropriate child restraint, which:

- conforms to the United Nations standard, ECE Regulation 44.04, or to the new i-Size regulation, R129
- is suitable for the child's weight and size
- is correctly fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

It is illegal and dangerous to put a rear-facing car seat in the front passenger seat of a vehicle if there is an active airbag.

It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that children under the age of 14 are restrained correctly in accordance with the law.

For more information on child car seats, visit our Child Car Seats website.

Autonomous Vehicles

In the last decade, vehicles have become increasingly autonomous, performing tasks such as automatically operating window wipers and lights. Technology has also developed within vehicles to assist with the driving task, including features such as park assist, reverse cameras, cruise control and lane assist.

The automation of vehicles is set to become more widespread. A fully autonomous vehicle is capable of completing journeys safely and efficiently, without a 'human driver' in all road and weather conditions. This will mean that less and less input is needed from the 'human driver' during the driving task. This could also lead to shifts in the way that cars and other vehicles are used and owned.

Some automated vehicles are already able to operate reliably in some contexts, but variable performance in other conditions means that these technologies will need to be further developed before autonomous vehicles become a common sight on Britain's roads.

If used properly, autonomous vehicles have enormous potential to reduce crashes and casualties, but if they are not used properly they can increase risk, especially if drivers over-rely on technology.

For more information on autonomous vehicles, view our autonomous vehicles factsheet.

Driving for Work

Many people drive for work. Some are professional drivers, but many simply drive to meetings, either using a company car, or increasingly their own car.

Driving is the most dangerous work activity that most people do and accounts for around 25 per cent of all road collisions. It contributes to far more accidental deaths and serious injuries than all other work-related activities. Police road accident data shows that every year more than 500 people are killed, 5,000 seriously injured and more than 40,000 slightly injured in collisions involving drivers or riders who are travelling for work; these figures include other road users, as well as the at-work drivers and riders themselves. In fact, 70 per cent of those killed in a work-related journey collision are passengers, pedestrians and riders, rather than at-work riders or drivers.

For many of those who drive for work, their only driver training has been what was required to pass their driving test.

The Health and Safety Executive now recognises that staff driving as part of their employment are covered by health and safety legislation, and employers have a duty to ensure that they do so as safely as possible. Employers should be implementing policies and systems designed to ensure staff safety while driving.

The problem of work-related road crashes has been exacerbated by the rise of the gig economy and the popularity of zero hours contracts. Some people may drive or ride for a number of different employers.

For more information on driving for work, view our employer resources.

Older Drivers

Driving a car is an important part of personal, family, and work life, providing freedom and independence to get about. Driving can be enjoyable and pleasant, but it also involves a certain amount of risk, and can be stressful.

Experienced drivers are, in general, safer than those with less experience. But as drivers get older, their health, often including their eyesight, physical fitness and reaction time, begins to decline. Age-related conditions can also begin to affect driving. This is different for each person; there isn't an age at which people become automatically unsafe to drive.

Driving licences expire at 70, and need to be renewed every three years thereafter. However, this can be more often if stipulated by the DVLA.

Each of us is personally responsible for making sure that we are fit to drive. Some physical or medical conditions must, by law, be reported to the DVLA. Other conditions do not need to be reported, but may still affect a person's ability to drive.

Many drivers recognise that their driving ability is changing and so change when and where they drive (this is often called 'self-regulation'). There are also several simple things drivers can do to help them to continue to drive, safely, for as long as possible, such as taking regular driving assessments and refresher training.

RoSPA does not call for mandatory retesting of drivers at 70.

For more information on older drivers visit the Older Drivers Website and older drivers' policy paper.

Mobility Scooters

In 2018, mobility scooters were involved in 13 fatal accidents and 64 accidents resulting in serious injury. Overall, there were 249 reported personal injury accidents involving mobility scooters.

There are two classes of powered scooters:

- **Class 2 (powered wheelchairs and scooters)**, which are only suitable for riding on pavements and have a top speed of 4mph (6km/h)
- **Class 3 (powered wheelchairs and other outdoor powered vehicles, including scooters)**, which are suitable for riding on roads and have a top speed of 8mph (12km/h). These also have a switch to limit the top speed to 4mph on pavements and footpaths. A class 3 vehicle is not legally defined as a motor vehicle and the user does not have to have a driving licence or take a driving test. However, a class 3 vehicle can only be used by a disabled person aged 14 or over, or by an able-bodied person who is demonstrating a vehicle before selling it, training a disabled user, or taking a vehicle to or from a place for maintenance or repair.

Mobility scooters do not need to be insured by law, although it is strongly advised.

Pedal Cyclists

Cycling in Great Britain is increasing because it is an excellent way to get about and provides a wide range of health and environmental benefits. However as with all forms of transport, it carries a certain amount of risk.

In 2018, 17,550 cyclists were injured in reported road accidents, including 4,205 who were killed or seriously injured. Males are far more likely to be involved in cycling accidents than females. In 2018, 80 per cent of those injured in a reported cycle accident were male[5].

Almost two thirds of cyclists killed or seriously injured were involved in collisions at, or near, a road junction, with T-junctions being the most commonly involved. Roundabouts are particularly dangerous junctions for cyclists. Not surprisingly, the severity of any injury suffered by a cyclist increases with the speed limit, meaning that riders are more likely to suffer a serious or fatal injury on a higher-speed road. Almost half of cyclist deaths occur on rural roads.

Cyclists are not required to tax or insure their bike by law, but like motor vehicles they must follow all traffic signs and signals. Failure to do so could lead to them being charged with cycling carelessly (up to £1,000 fine), dangerously (up to £2,000 fine) or furiously (maximum of £1,000 fine).

Helmet wearing is not mandated by law, although RoSPA strongly recommends that one be worn for the reasons outlined in our factsheet.

For more information on cycling, view our cycling advice and information and free resources.

[5] Department for Transport (2019) 'Table RAS30010: Reported casualties by gender, road user type and severity, Great Britain, 2010-14 average, 2011 – 2018' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents#casualties-by-type-of-casualty

Electric Bikes (E-bikes)

An electric bike, sometimes known as an e-bike, is a motor-assisted pedal bike. They often look just like a conventional pedal cycle, but include a rechargeable battery and motor, alleviating some of the pressure of pedalling. The cyclist can choose when to engage the battery, meaning that when the cyclist pedals, the motor begins to run to take some of the strain of cycling. Once it reaches a top speed of 15.5mph, the motor cuts out.

In England, Scotland and Wales, cyclists aged 14 and over may ride an electric bike as long as it meets certain requirements. A licence is not required to ride one and the electric bike does not need to be registered, taxed or insured. However there are different rules in Northern Ireland, where a cyclist wishing to ride an electric bike must have a moped licence and register, tax and insure their bike.

For more information, view our E-bikes factsheet.

Electric Scooters (E-scooters)

Electric scooters, sometimes known as e-scooters, look much like a conventional scooter but are fitted with rechargeable batteries to make them electric. They are slightly slower than electric bikes, with speeds ranging from 9mph to 15mph.

The Department for Transport uses the term “powered transporters” to refer to motor-powered personal transport devices, including e-scooters. However, they are also known as Personal Light Electric Vehicles (PLEVs). The Road Traffic Act 1988 states that a “motor vehicle” is “any mechanically propelled vehicle intended or adapted for use on roads”, which means e-scooters fall under this definition and are subject to motor vehicle laws. These laws require motor vehicles to be taxed and registered, however PLEVs are exempt from these requirements, meaning e-scooters fall into a grey area of the law.

Currently, e-scooters can only be legally used on private land.

For more information, view our electric scooters factsheet.

Pedestrians

In 2018, 456 pedestrians were killed, 6,337 were seriously injured and a total of 22,432 were injured in reported road crashes in Great Britain; 28 of the pedestrians killed that year were children aged 15 and under.

Some pedestrians (older teenagers and young adults) are being injured as a result of 'distraction', as they cross the road while using their phone or wearing headphones. Secondary activities they are engaged in can include having a conversation on the phone, listening to music, texting or browsing the internet.

Pedestrians need to be able to use all of their senses when crossing the road or walking near traffic. Looking properly when walking is as important as when driving, so it's important to take care not to be distracted, whether by mobile phones, listening to music or being caught up in conversations with other people.

Statistics show that, of more 14,000 collisions in which a contributory factor was assigned to a pedestrian, in 49 per cent the pedestrian had failed to look properly, 16 per cent were described as 'careless, reckless or in a hurry', and in 14 per cent the pedestrian had failed to judge the vehicle's path or speed[6].

[6] Department for Transport (2019) 'Table RAS5004: Reported accidents involving pedestrians with contributory factors, Great Britain, 2018' https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras50-contributory-factors

Pavement Parking

In London, pavement parking is prohibited unless there is a sign there that specifically permits it. London boroughs and the City of London can issue parking tickets to any vehicles parked on pavements, under the Greater London (General Purposes) Act 1974. The maximum fine for this offence is £100.

Since 1991, parking on pavements has been a decriminalised offence in many parts of the UK and is essentially the responsibility of individual local authorities. In England, outside of London, local authorities have some limited powers to address pavement parking. Local authorities have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to make traffic regulation orders to restrict or prohibit, parking at a specified street or road or part of a street or road. Once parking on pavements is banned on a particular street, civil enforcement officers are able to enforce it by issuing a parking control notice.

The Scottish Parliament passed a bill on October 10 2019 that will outlaw pavement parking across the country. As of 2021, drivers will no longer be able to park on the pavement in Scotland.

However, the Highway Code already makes it clear that drivers should not park on pavements. Rule 244 states:

"You **MUST NOT** park partially or wholly on the pavement in London, and should not do so elsewhere unless signs permit it. Parking on the pavement can obstruct and seriously inconvenience pedestrians, people in wheelchairs or with visual impairments and people with prams or pushchairs."

Despite this, there is a substantial level of parking by drivers that disregards this advice.

Useful Links

www.rospa.com
Comprehensive information and advice on road safety.

www.childcarseats.org.uk
Information and advice for parents, practitioners and anyone transporting children in child car seats.

www.olderdrivers.org.uk
Information and advice for older drivers and their families on driving safely, for longer.

www.think.gov.uk
Website of the Government THINK! Road Safety publicity campaigns. It provides information on road safety campaigns and advice for the public.

www.dft.gov.uk
Information on:

- Road safety strategy
- Child road safety
- Consultation papers
- Driver and rider safety
- Driving for work
- Driver insurance
- Local authorities
- Research

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code
The Highway Code

www.ofcom.org.uk
Ofcom is the UK's communications regulator. It is the UK government-approved regulatory and competition authority for the broadcasting and telecommunications for the United Kingdom.
Ofcom has other duties as laid down in the **Communications Act 2003**.

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