

Next month May 2012 will mark one year since the launch of United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020. The first major initiative by this country has been the creation of the National Road Safety Council of Trinidad and Tobago (NRSC) a few weeks ago by the Ministry of Transport, which has been mandated to develop a strategic approach to reducing the number of road traffic fatalities and collisions on our nation's roadways.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Inland Transport Committee published their report called *Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic Working Party on Road Traffic Safety* in 2010. It states, "...the principal factor in road accidents is human error, so that any effort to increase the level of road safety has to be primarily aimed at the prevention of this type of error as well as at ways to reduce the consequences without, however, ignoring other factors linked to the infrastructure and to vehicles."

Today, I address two of the issues that they have considered critical: speed and night-time driving.

Concerning speed, it states, "(a) Depending on the country, excessive or inappropriate speed is the origin of between 30 and 50 percent of fatal accidents; (b) excessive or inappropriate speed has dramatic consequences for pedestrians. The probability of a pedestrian being killed is multiplied by eight with an increase in impact speed from 30 km/h to 50 km/h..."

Speed

The report recommends several measures with regard to regulations, including the following:

(a) The installation of speed limiters on heavy vehicles which are already obligatory in certain countries. Moreover, it should be taken into account that some countries already

recommend the use of devices which help drivers to better to observe speed limits on light vehicles such as cruise control and/or speed limiters that can be adjusted by the driver.

(b) Ensure that infrastructure installations and the design of the road remove all uncertainty where drivers are concerned, i.e. by giving them means of easily identifying the type of road they are on and the type of users they are likely to meet;

(c) Ensure a safety-enhancing design for the edge of the road in order to reduce the possible consequences of some driver errors in the case of the vehicle leaving the road.

(d) Make speed checks an essential element of observing speed limits by giving drivers the impression that they may be checked at any time (see also chapter 2, section 2.3 of the present Resolution which is devoted exclusively to checks and penalties).

Night driving

The report states that "*the risk of accidents is not only considerably higher by night than by day but the accidents are also much more serious... Particular factors are conditions of visibility (visual capacity significantly reduced, insufficient contrasts, dazzle which incapacitates weak or tired eyes for several seconds, etc.), alcohol, stress and fatigue which lengthen reaction times, and the lack of adequate training for night driving. All these and many other aspects lead drivers to misinterpret the phenomena of the road environment and to react inappropriately as a result.*"

The report recommends several measures with regard to regulations, including the following:

(a) Ensure very careful preparation of the vehicle (in particular, check the lights and ensure that they are clean) and the journey;

(b) Be rested when taking the wheel;

(c) Restrict driving speed even if the traffic is light;

(d) Not stare at the headlights of oncoming vehicles;

(e) Stop at least every two hours and imperatively at the first signs of tiredness (heavy headedness, itchy eyes, need to shift frequently, stiff neck, repeated yawning, difficulty in keeping a straight course, inattention to traffic and road signs, absent moments, etc.);

(f) Riders of two-wheeled vehicles should wear garments equipped with retro reflective material (vests, reflective strips on shoe soles, armbands, etc.);

(g) The authorities for their part should: (i) step up publicity on the risks of accidents at night; (ii) carry out campaigns to make pedestrians and riders of two-wheeled vehicles, cyclists in particular, more aware of the imperative need to be seen at night by other users through the use of the existing lighting systems on two-wheeled vehicles as well as retro-reflective materials (vests, reflective strips on shoe soles, armbands, etc.); (iii) improve the driver training and driving examination system so as to provide drivers with better instruction in the particularities of driving at night such as for example special eye techniques; (iv) improve traffic signing, roadside delineation, and road markings.

Sometime ago I reported on a study of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) traffic accident data between 2001 and the first half of 2005, and I repeat the relevant points as follows:

- One-third of all fatal traffic accidents occurred between 6:00pm and 12:00 midnight;
- Approximately 60% of all fatal traffic accidents occurred between 6:00pm and 6:00am;

- Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays together accounted for 55% of all fatal traffic accidents, with 20% of that figure on a Saturday as well as on a Sunday;
- Nearly 50% of all road fatalities were male victims between the age group 20-49, with about 60% of this figure in the age group 20-34; and,
- Over 80% of all road fatalities were males.

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