

# **REPORT ON ACTIVITIES DURING THE 2003/4 FESTIVE SEASON**

**Watson, W.**

Land Transport Regulation, National Department of Transport.

## **ABSTRACT**

**The presentation concentrates on details of and results achieved by Phase 8 of the Arrive Alive campaign, which took place during the Festive Season 2003/2004. The campaign encouraged the provinces and local authorities to participate in enforcement activities, concentrating on highly visible activities on a single theme supported by communication carried out nationally.**

**The campaign sought to include all aspects of road safety: advertising and public relations, heavy visible enforcement, and a coordinated effort in terms of strategic focus.**

**The public relations campaign reached the vast majority of South Africans in both advertisements and media campaigns.**

**A “lights on” campaign and a National Call Centre drove the message of the co-responsibility of all road users to regulate their own behavior, and to report violations to a central number from which warning letters would be dispatched.**

**The campaign was successful in reducing fatalities on South African roads over the previous season, in spite of an increase of 6% in traffic volumes.**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The National Department of Transport has implemented various projects under the Arrive Alive banner since 1997 in an attempt to work with provinces and other role players to reduce the carnage on our roads.

The Festive Season campaign traditionally receives huge publicity because there is little other news at this time of the year, and the department takes advantage of this vacuum, and the fact that many families are traveling away together, to highlight road safety issues.

We are all aware that the cost of road trauma is astronomical world wide, and that in South Africa alone it costs around R18 billion annually. This is three times the budget of the entire Department of Transport. Africa spends twice as much on the results of road trauma as it receives in aid. This has a huge impact on development, NEPAD and the African Renaissance.

The impact that can be achieved depends on a clear understanding of the context in which we work:

- More than 90% of crashes follow a traffic violation of some kind
- Most violations are committed by a few road users – around 25% of road users are risk takers
- 40% of deaths are of pedestrians, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of these in rural areas, and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in the urban environment.
- 30% of deaths are of passengers

The most difficult people to reach in terms of behaviour change are those who we term “risk takers”. Most of these are young men in the 18-34 year old group.

During the planning for the Festive Season we decided to focus very heavily in areas where we considered we could achieve a quick impact: heavy, visible enforcement together with advertising and public relations to support the enforcement message.

We cut out all extraneous activities, buying of T-shirts and caps, large events, hand-outs etc. and concentrated on the above two elements only for December.

Themes for the Festive Season were identified as follows:

October: Sensitisation of the public  
November: Vehicle and Driver Fitness  
December: Reckless driving, speed and alcohol  
January: Pedestrians  
Easter 2004: Seat belts and child restraints.

## **2. RESULTS**

There was a small reduction in deaths over the previous festive season.

Traffic volumes increased by around 6.5% and deaths decreased by 2.26%. This led to a saving of around 100 lives for December. Although we would like to have seen a bigger reduction, the long term trends are looking promising on a year-on-year basis.

As the Festive Season campaign had been successful, a similar campaign was embarked upon at Easter with very positive results. Operation Juggernaut once again heightened the visibility of enforcement officers, and a very comprehensive radio and TV campaign focusing on seat belt wearing was flighted. During the five day Easter period, deaths decreased by around 22%, and fatal crashes by more than 9%. This was originally attributed to the extra holidays around election day, but in fact statistics confirmed that traffic volumes had actually increased over the five days measured.

There is limited value in measuring month to month figures, as a long-term downward trend is what is important. The five days at Easter, although indicating a saving of 50 lives, 200 serious injuries and 500 slight injuries, are encouraging, but also not an indication of an effective long-term road safety strategy.

However, the long-term picture is also encouraging. For the first three months of the year between 2001 and 2002, fatalities increased by 4.62%. Between 2002 and 2003 they increased by 8.42%. Between 2003 and 2004, however, fatalities decreased by 1.13%. Although this is a very small gain, it is nevertheless a gain in terms of life saved, and is promising in the light of increased deaths over the previous three years.

## **3. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**

We flighted eight advertisements, emphasizing the very real and human stories and showing people with permanent disabilities or who have lost loved ones in road trauma. These were supported by radio advertisements and posters, including some posters on the back of trucks with similar messages.

We had 527 interviews on radio and TV, valued at R7.8 million, and 629 newspaper articles emphasizing the co-responsibility of all road users to take care, and the results of unsafe behaviour on families and individuals. We also highlighted the dangerous routes and behaviours which led to most deaths.

We reached about 80% of TV viewers around 12 times each, and more than 90% of radio listeners more than 20 times each.

Research carried out by the University of Natal Interdisciplinary Accident Research Centre (UNIARC) indicated that more than 85% of the interviewees were aware of Arrive Alive as a brand. Most of these (78%) heard messages on the radio, slightly fewer on television, with newspapers and billboards also adding to the saturation.

Almost all of the viewers who saw the TV advertisements felt that they were effective, and the vast majority of the public felt that other mediums also had an effect.

The recognition rate of the Arrive Alive brand for the entire country was 85% but was low in the Western Cape (53%) where much of the budget is spent on newspaper advertising. This would indicate that electronic media are the most effective methods of communication road safety issues.

Drivers were asked to drive with their lights on to support road safety and to make their vehicles more visible, especially to pedestrians. This was highly effective, with 68% of people being aware of the project, and 65% of these believing that it worked. Radio interviews with presenters and members of the public stressed that this campaign really raised awareness, and also showed support for Arrive Alive, as well as creating a “camaraderie” among road users who supported safe driving.

#### **4. FATALITIES**

What was important is that we emphasized the importance of every single death, and moved away from the “cricket score” type of approach that we had previously. NDOT issued figures once a week at a media briefing, and the provinces were left to issue statements on their own figures and details of individual crashes if they chose to do that.

The data that we collected confirmed previous findings:

- pedestrian deaths are of primary concern.
- Ordinary motor cars are most often the vehicles involved in crashes.
- Most crashes occur over weekends

What is worrying is the continued high violation rate with regard to speeding. Around 20% of vehicles exceed the speed limit on the major routes.

#### **5. LONG TERM TRENDS**

- Between 2001 and 2002 fatal crashes increased by nearly 10%
- Between 2002 and 2003 this increase dropped to under 2%, in spite of an increase in traffic volumes because of a growing economy and various other factors.
- The severity rate per crash has also dropped over this period.
- Looking at fatalities per 100,000 population the drop is just as dramatic, with a drop from a 6.86% increase to a .36% decrease between 2002 and 2003.
- The year-on-year fatalities decreased from a 13.3% increase to a 2.35% increase.

## **6. ENFORCEMENT**

Operation Juggernaut targeted heavy vehicles, taxis and buses from 9 November, and carried on until the end of January. In the first two months more than a million vehicles were screened and nearly 20,000 notices were issued. More than 8000 vehicles were suspended.

The operation led to substantial decreases in the number of unregistered vehicles on the NaTIS system, and highlighted the importance of visible, high profile effective policing.

53% of members of the public felt that enforcement was heavier than normal over the Festive Season, and of these 51% said that it affected their driving. Only 36% of people felt that enforcement was effective and that traffic officers were sufficiently active. Once again there is the perception that they are out there, but what are they doing?

Road users do not believe that if they behave unacceptably on the roads, they will be caught and punished. Road crime is still regarded as “folk crime” and is not taken seriously. Until we increase levels of enforcement, and find a way of forcing people to pay their fines we will not change behavior. Only around 17% of people presently pay traffic fines.

## **7. CALL CENTRE**

To emphasise the co-responsibility of all road users, we opened a call centre which received hundreds of calls reporting violations. Many road users signed up as observers, and more than 1000 letters were sent to offending motorists. The number of calls has forced us to increase the working hours of this center and it now remains open until 10 at night.

## **8. WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

- We are undertaking a feasibility study to consider the establishment of a National Highway Patrol which will fall under the Department of Transport.
- We are going to increase our communication reach, with messages similar to those used during the Festive Season, and to again emphasise co-responsibility and the necessity to take each and every road death as a tragedy.
- We have started a unit dealing specifically with fraud and corruption, and we hope to use NIA and other organizations to really make a difference in this area in the short term.
- AARTO and RTMC must be reconsidered and their crucial elements made operative even if some of the concepts are changed.
- We are working with NIA, the Asset Forfeiture Unit and others to enforce forfeiture of vehicles of repeat offenders. Legislation already allows forfeiture of the tools with which a crime is committed, and for which the sentence can be more than 1 years imprisonment. Test cases will be carried out before July 2005 to test this strategy in the courts.
- It is vital that we use new technology to bolster our limited resources and ensure that we maintain the perception of high enforcement, effective prosecution and punishment and try and change the behavior of those risk takers who are a danger to themselves and to others.

The research undertaken by UNIARC indicates that there was no substantial decrease in the percentage deaths but that the communication, to be effective, needs to be backed up by more enforcement, preferably through a nationally coordinated traffic law enforcement programme, such as the Road Traffic Management Corporation. Centralised traffic intelligence units should be able to identify areas where there is a high crash risk, and ensure that enforcement takes place in these areas. Ongoing evaluation of traffic law enforcement needs to feed in findings from this unit to the planning.

Every life lost on our roads is one too many. Each and every death is a tragedy for the family concerned. As a result of the success of the campaign, fewer families are bereaved, and will be reminded each year of their loss. We must build on this success to ensure that we can continue to work together with ALL road users, and share responsibility for safety on the road, and share the praise for reducing deaths and serious, disabling injuries.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Wendy P Watson is the General Manager; Land Transport Regulation for the Department of Transport, previously having been Manager: Strategy and Planning in KwaZulu Natal with Asiphephe.

Her employment history is varied and includes some work towards transformation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and various other activist organisation, for which she has been granted an Honorary Doctorate by a University in the USA.

Wendy sees road safety as a human rights issue, and is committed to seeing a substantial reduction in the pain, suffering and loss of money which is the result of poor behaviour on our roads.