

Driving the point home

Around 2000 people die on the UK's roads every year – a horrific number that could be substantially reduced, suggests **Dr Tim Marsh**, if more organisations took a proactive and hard-hitting approach to training employees who drive.

SOME TIME AGO, I WAS INVITED TO ATTEND THE Staffordshire Police 'Crash Course' driving awareness session – though I should be honest and admit it was one of those "attend or get three points" invitations! (I explained to the constables involved that on a dry, sunny day, with little traffic on the M6 toll and in a relatively new Volvo I was very comfortable with my dynamic risk-assessment findings. They, of course, were somewhat less convinced...)

Regardless of the technical reasons for attending, the course itself proved both moving and informative and it's a couple of hours that I feel should be compulsory for all drivers before they are allowed out on the road. When you look at the national figures it's staggering that, even though more and more forces are offering such courses, they aren't more widespread. Indeed I was tempted to sub-title this article 'How a two-hour presentation on road safety by the Police could save the UK thousands of lives and £2.5 billion a year'. Using the Crash Course principles of 'let the data tell the tale' I'll try to explain why.

The stakes are high

In the UK we kill approximately 10 people on the roads for every one we kill in work (just under 2000 on the roads¹ but fewer than 200 – officially – at work²). In the Greater Manchester area, where I live, that equates to around one fatality every other day. In addition, every single day, a handful will suffer what is called a "life-changing" incident. Life-changing, of course, means never able to walk again, or, perhaps, badly brain-damaged.

Overall, the cost to the UK economy of such incidents is estimated to be a quite staggering £2.7 billion. (Incidentally, since '9/11' some 12 million people have been killed worldwide on the roads but no planes have been successfully hijacked. That fact always gives me pause for thought as I shuffle in interminable queues at the airport.)

In terms of disruption, of course, it doesn't matter where an employee suffers such an incident – be it on the way to work, driving for work, or on the way to the supermarket. The disruption will be severe even if it's 'only' a family member involved. You really don't get much productivity out of a worker whose 18-year-old child has just been killed in a car accident.

Mindful of these figures some organisations tackle this topic aggressively. For example, some years ago the oil and gas giant Schlumberger noticed that despite an excellent safety record generally they'd suffered three fatalities worldwide in the previous year – but all involving managers driving to work. So now all employees are required to watch a series of DVDs that run through basic defensive driving techniques, and then accurately answer questions following each section.

High-risk drivers also have to undertake a "commentary drive" yearly where they have a professional instructor sit in with them and score their commentary – which, for example, might go something like this: "I'm approaching the end of the M6 toll, which is notoriously confusing and I know that half the drivers around me will be looking up working out which lane they need, and the other half will then change lanes in a hurry, so I've taken that two-second rule – which should always be treated as a minimum not an ideal anyway, of course – and given myself a four-second gap..." Lots of ticks for that!

Of course, what the company wants here is for that highly experienced and capable offshore installation manager who runs its billion-pound field in the North Sea to be less likely to be killed on the way to his golf club. It's worth reiterating that, statistically, he's 10 times more likely to be killed driving to his club than working on, or even travelling by helicopter to, his platform.

Sessions of this type can also include a coaching element. For example, imagine you pull up to turn right at a main junction (or left, depending on where you live). Nearly all of us will instinctively point our wheels in the direction of intended travel as we wait but we really shouldn't until we're ready to go. A driving coach asked me once: "Look in the mirror at that big ugly lorry juddering alarmingly to a halt behind us. Now look at that huge lorry that just thundered past in front of us as we wait. Now consider this: if the lorry behind had bumped us – because of where you're pointing he'd have nudged us right into that fella's path..."

It's a mystery to me why more organisations simply aren't running training of this kind and that their MORR (management of road risk) policy is simply to have issued a glossy and comprehensive document that will be flicked through and put on a shelf. We all know this achieves the "square root of feck all", as Craggy Island's Father Ted would say. The late great Ian Whittingham MBE was always wonderfully direct about the effectiveness of such an approach, too!

Sticky learning

The Staffordshire Police (and several organisations like it) is trying to tackle these issues proactively, with



a 'no blame' philosophy. The force simply hasn't got the manpower to run such training even if organisations requested it – but it does have vast amounts of passion and experience, which it has channelled into the production of the above-mentioned 'Crash Course' presentations – the alternative option to three points on the licence for a minor offence.

The force is exploiting the 80:20, or 'Pareto' principle³ by delivering a big impact with a short punchy session. It simply illustrates its points and data – like the driving coach described above – and lets participants work it out for themselves. Importantly, studies show that a discovered learning moment is worth its weight in gold because it "sticks" and has a lasting impact.

The course itself is split into four parts. Firstly, senior fireman Stuart Smith describes some major incidents he has seen, illustrated with some graphic images and haunting music, and emphasises just how frequent they are. But the session really begins to grip participants as he starts to talk about the day he attended an accident to find his own daughter's car upside down in a field...

Smith goes on to explain that his work is difficult and dangerous and that he has buried three colleagues over the years. However, he points out that none was actually doing the job itself when they died. All three were simply driving to work.

The next speaker is Neil Mycock, a senior incident investigator. Again, in a no-blame way, and speaking

Against a background of horrendous images of mangled and blood-stained steel participants in the 'Crash Course' are told about the reasons: speeding, distraction, incorrect tyre pressure, etc.
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from a behavioural perspective rather than a judgemental one, Neil simply describes the reasons for the hundreds of accidents he has seen and, again, these are illustrated with some graphic imagery. Against a background of horrendous images of mangled and blood-stained steel participants are told more about the reasons: this one due to speeding, that one because of distraction, this one a result of tyre pressure.

Neil is followed by a filmed interview with a middle-aged prisoner who was distracted by a call and killed someone with his lorry. He seems like a very nice chap and, of course, he has been selected as an "everyman", so he talks about how much he misses his grandchildren, and the terrible guilt he feels about the person he killed. Everyone knows that with a bit of bad luck – or, perhaps, without some *good* luck along the way, depending on driving habits – it could well have been them giving the interview.

So far, so interesting and illuminating, and already huge amounts of food for thought, but then comes a great big walloping thump between the eyes: the final presentations from Ann Morris and Colette Bennett. Ann is the head of 'Crash Course' and, as well as introducing the prison film and discussing what prison is really like, she talks about her own serious accident. Finally, Colette, who is a grief counsellor, talks about some of the people she has helped – frankly, she has dealt with things you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy.

At this point, it will be getting close to unbearable

and there won't be a person in the room with half a heart who isn't sitting with, metaphorically at least, their hands raised, palms up saying: "OK, OK, please stop now, I promise..."

Having grabbed people's attention the presentation finishes with two take-home DVDs, in which positive behaviours are stressed. The first is a review of the principles of Heinrich's Triangle⁴ and how the fewer unsafe acts committed mean the less luck is needed. There is also a reminder of what the key positive behaviours are. The second is presented by trauma specialist Dr Mark Nash and is a user-friendly overview of what you should do if you are first on the scene of a car or motorcycle incident.

Impact

All good safety professionals and behavioural-safety exponents reading this will be musing that, of course the attendees all drove home safely *that* night but what about the long-term impact? "Show me the money," as they say in the movies. We know that the best way to change a person's behaviour is to change their environment but if you can't and have to focus on the person themselves it's best – as Marcin Nazaruk, writing elsewhere in this issue, also explains – to use illustration and rational data, not hectoring.

The good news is that the illustrative, data-driven, no-blame approach adopted by the Crash Course team fits the theory and does seem to work very well indeed. A study of course attendees shows that re-offending over a two-year period was *13 times lower* for those that attended. (Specifically, the re-offending rate is 0.25 of a per cent compared to 3.21 per cent for the 'take the points' control group, with both samples statistically robust and numbering more than 500.)

Now, there are two self-selecting variables about the 'chose to attend' individuals that might skew the data. Firstly, there are those (probably sitting at the front) who are, perhaps, more open-minded and thoughtful than the average Joe and arguably less likely to re-offend anyway. Then, however, there are those (probably sitting at the back) who accepted the invitation because they know full well that more points will probably be acquired soon, and attendance is seen as practical damage limitation! Frankly, I'd imagine they balance each other out.

Regardless, these figures are certainly worth playing with a bit as, basically, though the control-group re-offending figure is one in 33 of those who sit through the Crash Course, only one in 400 will re-offend within two years. We know from Heinrich's Triangle that the number of unsafe acts is directly related to incident rates so, extrapolated out to the general population, that would take the annual fatality rate in the UK from just under 3000 to about 230. (Worldwide, it would, quite unbelievably, represent a saving of more than one million lives! I checked the data and it's more than 1.1m, actually.)

But extrapolating data from a 'self-selecting' sample is a statistical minefield so, to be safe, let's halve that projected saving. Then let's halve it again, just to be *really* fair. That would still be around 700 lives saved in the UK and thousands of 'life-changing'

ANOTHER HIDDEN KILLER

It is 15 years since RoSPA launched its Managing Occupational Road Risk (MORR) campaign – the first concerted move to highlight the issue of occupational road risk, writes the Society's head of road safety, Kevin Clinton.

The discussion paper published at the time estimated that up to a quarter of road deaths involved cars, vans and other vehicles being driven in the course of work activities.

Subsequent research has estimated that up to a third of road accidents involve someone who is at work at the time. Using the most recent casualty figures means that in 2010, more than 600 people could have died, with a further 7500 suffering serious injuries, in work-related accidents on Great Britain's roads.

Throughout RoSPA's Managing Occupational Road Risk (MORR) campaign, the aim has been to encourage and help employers take the issue seriously and address it in the same way as other aspects of work safety. Indeed, this is what the law requires. But MORR does not just make sense for legal reasons – the moral case cannot be disputed, and there is also a strong business case.

When addressing occupational road risk, a systematic management approach works best, rather than a series of one-off interventions. Essentially, employers must conduct suitable risk assessments and put in place all reasonably practicable measures to ensure that work-related journeys are safe, staff are fit and competent to drive safely, and the vehicles used are fit for purpose and in a safe condition.

For more information about the origins of the campaign and details of the help available, including a range of free resources for employers, visit www.rospa.com/roadsafety



injuries avoided every year – not to mention around £500 million saved by 'UK plc'.

As I said at the beginning, I really do think courses of this type should be, in some format, compulsory, and that (government initiatives aside) many organisations are missing an excellent opportunity to minimise loss and disruption. ■

The Crash Course sessions have been turned into a 74-minute DVD, accompanied by a trainer's handbook and designed to be used in a half-day in-house session. SHP has five copies of the DVD from Baker Media to give away to contributors of the five best letters/online comments we receive on Dr Marsh's article.

References

- 1 Department for Transport statistics for 2010 – www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/road-accidents-and-safety/
- 2 There were 147 people killed at work in 2010/11, according to official HSE statistics – www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/index.htm
- 3 The Pareto principle (also known as the 80-20 rule, the law of the vital few, and the principle of factor sparsity) states that, for many events, roughly 80 per cent of the effects come from 20 per cent of the causes
- 4 American industrial safety pioneer Herbert William Heinrich held that, in a workplace, for every accident that causes a major injury, there are 29 accidents that cause minor injuries and 300 accidents that cause no injuries. Because many accidents share common root causes, he said, addressing more commonplace accidents that don't cause injuries can prevent accidents that do

Tim Marsh is managing director of Ryder-Marsh Safety (Ltd) – see page 4 for more information