

Wednesday 22 July, 2009

New road measures needed to curb fatalities

Australia needs to follow Europe's lead and trial more innovative road safety measures to help curb the nation's appalling road toll.

This is the message from University of Adelaide senior researcher Dr Jeremy Woolley, who says ageing road infrastructure and old fashioned views are all contributing to road deaths.

Dr Woolley, from the University's Centre for Automotive Safety Research, will present a free public seminar in Adelaide this Friday 24 July as part of a regular series of talks on major causes of road accidents.

"We have a road system that is based on principles developed during rapid motorisation following the Second World War," Dr Woolley says. "These roads were built for much less capable cars and trucks and lower volumes of traffic. Unfortunately, we have not reassessed many of these principles to see whether they are still appropriate."

Right turn arrows at traffic signals should be the rule, rather than the exception, Dr Woolley argues, and crash barriers should be installed in the centre of high-risk roads to reduce the severity of loss of control and head-on crashes.

"The current filter right turn at signals where motorists select a gap in traffic in the absence of a right turn arrow is an extremely hazardous manoeuvre," he says. "We have to justify the use of a right turn arrow, but it should be the norm."

Dr Woolley says Sweden and Norway have curbed their road toll by erecting crash barriers in the centre of roads.

"It does have implications for overtaking and also restricts access to properties, but if we are to make progress we need to adopt these measures because they have been trialled and proven successful.

"We have developed a very car-centric view of the world which is rarely challenged. People expect to be able to park in front of businesses, have unlimited access to properties and own vehicles capable of speeds well above current speed limits. If we are to reduce road injuries, some of these things will need to change. We cannot rely on behavioural change alone to improve road safety."

Dr Woolley says that the creation of a more forgiving roadside environment is necessary if we are to address Australia's road toll, which stands at 660 (as of July 20).

"We must challenge some of the things that the community takes for granted if we are to make further progress with improving road safety. Far more people are killed on our roads each year than die in wars, or are murdered, but we have become immune."

WHAT: "Managing Traffic Safety" by Dr Jeremy Woolley

WHEN: 4pm-5.30pm, Friday 24 July

WHERE: Art Gallery Auditorium

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