

Road Safety

Drink driving

I spent my late teens and early 20's in the Australian Army, late 20's and 30's at mine sites, tough, male orientated environments where heavy drinking was encouraged. I used to regularly drink & drive, sometimes pretty pissed, obviously at odds with my safety role at work.

When I started my first mining safety job the company decided to put me in a day shift relief mining supervisors job for a month to get to know the blokes and understand the operations. My first job Monday morning was to drive down the haul road to see how many guide posts had to be replaced. The haul truck drivers used to start the first shift of the week 11 pm Sunday night and come into work tired and / or pissed from the weekend. They used to lose attention, drift off the road, knock out the guide post and the theory was the stimulus of drifting into the table drain used to wake them up. Sunday night was always the worst time for guide posts.

Was probably 1976 at Blackwater mine when I was at a Christmas function at the mine, got a call that a company car had rolled and the 2 occupants were trapped in the car, I gather together a few mine rescue squad people (all of us pissed), jump in the mine rescue vehicle and proceed to extricate the 2 pissed occupants of the rolled vehicle. Even though they had quite a few injuries they did not want to be taken to hospital as this would attract the attention of the coppers.

Was probably 1979 I had an advanced driving consultant come to the mine to run a course for supervisors, he gets to talk about drink driving, one participant says he cannot understand all the fuss about drink driving as it is only a 6 pack trip from the mine to town (about 20 kilometres)

After a bushfire came through the road from the mine to the town you could see the sun glistening off the empty stubbies on the side of the road from where people threw them out while driving home from the mine.

Driving from a mine to the nearby town we come across an overturned car, the passenger is sitting in the table drain and the driver is in the upside down car, I cut him out of the seat belt, take him out of the car and lay him on the ground, when I check his pulse there is none. The 2 blokes had had a gut full of grog at a happy hour at the mine.

For a number of years my company used to have annual mine picnics at the oval at the mine, great affairs with lots of entertainment for the family. Everybody had a gutful of grog & tucker and people were often seen leaving with a 6 pack for the trip back to town. After far too many car smashes the company put an end to the mine picnics.

The Qld mining industry has had random drug & grog testing at work for many years in an attempt to combat 2 major problems.

I have been very careful about drink driving for many years, I like to tell myself I am more responsible now but I have to admit that lurking in the back of my mind is the fact that I think I have a pretty good chance of being caught if I do drink & drive. I rarely go to a pub and am content to have a few drinks at home

Despite my advice all of my 3 boys have gone for D.D. The fine, the inconvenience, the humbling requirement to rely on me to get them to work & uni and their realisation that if they do it again they will get caught has changed their behaviour.

Drink driving is no longer socially acceptable and in some areas in Australia you have a good chance of being caught.

Seat belts

In my days leading mine rescue teams going to motor vehicle smashes you could just about bet on the survivors as the ones wearing seat belts and the dead uns not wearing seat belts. Some Brisbane taxi drivers do not wear seat belts, apparently they have an exemption, seems stupid to me. Am still surprised at the number of American movies you see where seat belts are not worn. I understand Australia has one of the highest rates of seat belt wearing in the world. More education than enforcement I suspect.

Suicide

As a young mine Safety Advisor I get a 2 way call that there has been a car smash on the mine access road, I got there and see a sedan on its roof and a 18 year old female smashed up against some big rocks. The car had rolled and end for ended several times and as she was not wearing a seat belt she was catapulted out where the windscreen used to be. As I attempted to comfort her as she lapsed in & out of consciousness she said things to me like "George, please do not let me die" We loaded her on the aerial ambulance to Rockhampton hospital where she died the next day. I do not mind telling you I hit the grog for awhile after that, was before the days of post traumatic stress syndrome counselling. This was probably a suicide job.

I am told a certain percentage of single vehicle and head on into trucks smashes are suicide.

Speeding

I have never been able to convince myself that driving a bit over the speed limit is a major sin with the exception of in school zones. I am told the 40 km per hour speed limit has been developed through research into the vulnerability of children's bodies to impact and there is some chance of survival at 40.

Speed cameras are more about revenue raising than road safety in my view.

Driver training

Many years ago I spent a time in the Army Reserve training drivers of 4 & 6 wheel drive vehicles, the Army had a very thorough approach. Driver training of young people is very controversial, there is a lot of research into how to do it better but I suspect the system is not prepared to make the required increased investment.

When I used to have advanced driving consultants run training at mines I could never convince myself it was as effective as the consultants maintained it was .A friend recently asked me about

advanced driver training for his teenage children. I contacted the road accident research centre at Qld Institute of Technology, C.A.R.R.S. and they do not support the concept of advanced driver training.

I did a course with C.A.R.R.S., everything they do is grounded in research about road safety, I would suggest they are a good resource.