

NEWS RELEASE

SPEEDING REMAINS MAIN KILLER ON EUROPEAN ROADS

25 September 2008, Bern – “It is deplorable that we are a very long way from rendering speeding as socially unacceptable as drink driving,” said Steve Stradling from the UK’s Transport Research Institute at today’s road safety Forum co-organised by ETSC⁽¹⁾ and the Swiss Council for Accident Prevention⁽²⁾. Experts looked at why drivers risk speeding against all odds and how to prevent this.

Speeding remains the single biggest contributory factor of traffic death and injury across Europe⁽³⁾. The higher the speed limit, the more frequently speed is cited as the cause of the accident: from 5.9% at a 30 km/h, through 20% at 60 km/h and up to 37% at 120 km/h. Scientific data show that a 5% increase in speed leads to approximately 10% more injuries, 16% more severe injuries and 25% more deaths⁽⁴⁾. The picture is even starker for pedestrians: if struck by a car at 30 km/h they have a 95% chance of survival, while at 65 km/h they survive in only 15% of cases⁽⁵⁾.

However, despite this overwhelming evidence, exceeding the speed limit remains a mass offence, bfu’s Raphael Denis Huguenin said at the Forum. *“Although people realise that high speed is dangerous, their behaviour does not match up to this understanding. In particular, speeding among young drivers and motorcyclists is a particular problem in most European countries. Excessive speed accounts for 26% of road collisions among 18-20 year-olds, and for under 10% among drivers aged 35 years and older. Speed is also responsible for 14% of collisions involving male drivers compared to 9% for female drivers.”*

“There are three main kinds of reasons why drivers speed,” said Steve Stradling from the UK’s Transport Research Institute. *“First, excessive technical capability of modern cars coupled with good road infrastructure and insufficient traffic law enforcement allow drivers to speed. Second, time or peer psychological pressure – overtaking, running late, anger or reacting to other drivers’ behaviour – urges many drivers to exceed speed limit occasionally. Third, some drivers, perhaps 1 in 5, like driving fast. These people need help!”*

“Unfortunately, exceeding speed limits remains socially acceptable”, said Raphael Denis Huguenin. This needs to be changed both through stricter police enforcement and more effective education. Licence suspension and vehicle confiscation should be considered for repeat offenders in all EU countries. Also, in view of the increase in cross-border traffic in Europe, we must adopt without delay the new Directive on cross-border enforcement, which would lead to follow up of speeding offences and feeling of impunity of transit drivers.

Klaus Machata from KfV, the Austrian Road Safety Board gave an overview of solutions for combating excessive speed: from proven measures such as road humps, raised zebra crossings, roundabouts and safety camera networks, to new experimental concepts of ‘shared space’. Existing in-built vehicle technology such as Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) systems, which warn drivers when they exceed speed limit or actively aide them to abide by the limit, should also be increasingly introduced on private and public fleet vehicles. *“However, apart from financial constraints, it’s all too often a lack of willingness on behalf of decision-makers that stands in the way of implementation of innovation,”* Klaus Machata said.

Notes to Editors:

(1) The **European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)** is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of the number and severity of transport crashes in Europe. The ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 40 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.be

(2) The **Swiss Council for Accident Prevention (bfu)** conducts research in road traffic, sport, home and leisure, and spreads knowledge and information to general public and specialist circles through consultancy, training and communications.

(3) According to OECD estimates, at any one moment 50% of drivers are exceeding legal speed limits. Speeding makes up as much as one third of the number of fatal accidents. OECD/ ECMT, 2006

(4) Dr. phil. Raphael Denis Huguenin, bfu (2008). Speed

(5) ETSC (2008). Managing Speed: Towards safe and sustainable road transport.