

## Open Load Space Project

### 1 Introduction

This paper outlines the Office of Road Safety in Western Australia's project to reduce deaths and injuries in which people were riding in the open load space of utilities and trucks. The Office of Road Safety has gradually implemented a ban on open load travel over a five year period.

On 1 January 2001 it became illegal to ride in the open load space of vehicles without rollover cages in Western Australia. On 1 January 2004 the Department of Planning and Infrastructure ceased to authorise the fitting of rollover cages, and from 1 January 2006 there will be a blanket prohibition on travel in open load spaces.

This paper examines the following aspects of this legislative ban on open load space travel:

- An evaluation of the impact of the partial ban on open load space travel;
- An overview of the campaign developed to promote awareness of the ban on open load space travel;
- A description of the particular importance of open load space travel for Aboriginal groups in Western Australia;
- A demonstration of the culturally-appropriate advertising campaign which has been developed for Aboriginal audiences.

### 2 Effects of the Partial Ban on Open Load Space Travel

In 1999 the Road Accident Prevention Research Unit in the Department of Public Health at the University of Western Australia undertook research into crashes involving utility trucks in Western Australia between 1987 and 1997.<sup>1</sup> The intention of this research was that it would act as a baseline for comparisons to be made in future years.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1987 and 1997 there were 3,213 people injured or killed in utilities in Western Australia. Every year between 245 and 338 utility passengers were injured in crashes (an average of 292 per year). On average, 11 utility passengers were killed each year.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Rina Cercarelli and Carol Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (Road Accident Prevention Research Unit, Department of Public Health, University of Western Australia, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Ideally this research project would have accurately charted the fatality and injury rates for open load space travel. However, crash data recorded by the Western Australian Police Service did not include detail on the positioning of passengers in vehicles. This means that it was not possible to distinguish between passengers in utilities who were seated in the front cab (with or without restraints) and passengers who were riding in the open load space. This makes the data considerably less useful for evaluating the open load space project.

People were proportionally more likely to be hurt in utilities than in passenger cars. On average, 482 utility passengers were injured per 1000 vehicles involved in a crash where an occupant was injured, compared with 433 car passengers.<sup>3</sup>

Further, people tended to be more severely injured in crashes involving utilities than those involving passenger cars. 122 of 3,213 people in utility crashes were killed (4%) compared with 486 of 41,790 people in car crashes (1%). Also 1,045 of 3,213 people in utility crashes were admitted to hospital (32%) while only 7,735 of 41,790 people in car crashes needed hospitalisation (17%).<sup>4</sup> This was almost certainly linked to the fact that people in utility crashes were most likely to injure their heads while people in car crashes were more likely to have external injuries to their bodies.

Utilities were more likely to be involved in single vehicle crashes such as roll-overs than passenger cars, and this pattern was even more marked outside the metropolitan area.<sup>5</sup> This information, combined with the particular severity of injuries sustained in utility crashes, suggests a pattern of casualties attributable to open load space travel. 'However it is not known how many of these were travelling in the open load space of the vehicle at the time of the crash.'<sup>6</sup>

The problems with establishing the extent of road trauma caused by travel in open load spaces meant that the Office of Road Safety was unable to establish an accurate baseline of road trauma in the period prior to the changes to the law. In 2000 the Office of Road Safety estimated that 4-8 lives were lost each year through crashes involving passengers in the open load space of vehicles and that 120 people were hospitalised each year as a result of crashes involving the open load space.<sup>7</sup> These figures must be treated with caution.

In conclusion, the baseline of information shows that utilities were proportionally more dangerous than passenger cars. Clearly this pattern is related to travel in the open load space of utilities, but the exact number of deaths and injuries attributable to open load space travel cannot be definitively established.

### **3 Open Load Space Casualties Since 2001**

In 2005 the Western Australian Police Service introduced a requirement that the seating position of all injured passengers be recorded for all Police attended crashes. This means that it will be possible to identify people in crashes where they were in the open load space of utilities.

Prior to this point this data was not recorded and it is not possible to definitively establish the number of fatalities or injuries in crashes where passengers were in the open load space of vehicles between 2001 – the introduction of the partial ban on open load space travel – and 2005 – the introduction of more comprehensive record keeping.

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<sup>3</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 16.

<sup>4</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 5.

<sup>5</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 17.

<sup>6</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 17.

<sup>7</sup> Open Load Space Project Briefing (Undated).

However, some data has been provided by the Western Australian Police Service on fatalities since 2001 which involved unrestrained passengers in utility trucks or trucks.<sup>8</sup> This data suggests that roughly 2 people have died each year since the introduction of the rollover legislation.

It is important to note that it was estimated that prior to 2001 4-8 people died each year from open load space crashes. There appears to have been a significant reduction in fatalities involving open load space travel since 2001. This indicates a change in open load space casualties, but this suggestion can only be made tentatively in the face of such problematic data.

#### 4 Campaign on the Ban on Open Load Space Travel

The Office of Road Safety is currently promoting the complete ban on open load space travel in utilities, trucks and panel vans which will be introduced on 1 January 2006. This campaign follows up on the extensive promotion of the partial ban – with the rollover cage – in 2001.

The Office of Road Safety has organised newspaper promotions and has distributed brochures on the 1 January 2006 deadline with the registration papers for all utilities, trucks and panel vans.

Additionally, the Office for Road Safety has developed an Indigenous-focussed, culturally-appropriate campaign which is explored in more detail in section six.

#### 5 Aboriginal Road Users

Aboriginal people are significantly more likely to die in crashes in utilities than non-indigenous Western Australians. Hospital data for people involved in car and utility crashes between 1987 and 1997 in Western Australia showed 13% of utility casualties were Aboriginal while only 8% of car casualties were Aboriginal.<sup>9</sup>

**Table One: Aboriginality of Car and Utility Passengers, 1987 – 1997 (Hospital Data)<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Utility – Number</b>	<b>Utility – Percentage</b>	<b>Car – Number</b>	<b>Car – Percentage</b>	<b>Total – Number</b>	<b>Total – Percentage</b>
Aboriginal	68	13.5%	253	8.5%	321	9.2%
Non-Aboriginal	434	86.3%	2,724	91.2%	3,158	90.5%
Unknown	1	0.2%	10	0.3%	11	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,987</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,490</b>	<b>100%</b>

A study of coroners' reports of road deaths in the Kimberley in the 1990s strongly indicates that Aboriginal people were particularly likely to be involved in open load space crashes. Between 1990 and 1994, 86.7% of open load space fatalities were

<sup>8</sup> However, it cannot be determined if these people were sitting unrestrained in the front of the utility or in the open load space.

<sup>9</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) vi.

<sup>10</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 11.

Aboriginal (in deaths where race was known) and 64% of total motor vehicle crash fatalities were Aboriginal (in deaths where race was recorded).<sup>11</sup>

Of the 20 incidents involving open load space travel in utilities reported between January 1999 and March 2000, only 30% were not Aboriginal.<sup>12</sup>

## **6 Indigenous-Focussed Campaign on the Ban on Open Load Space Travel**

In 2002 the Office of Road Safety undertook consultation with Aboriginal communities and road safety stakeholders on the most pressing issues in Aboriginal road safety. Unsafe travel – including riding in open load spaces – was highlighted as one of the three key concerns.

The Office of Road Safety has developed an indigenous-focussed campaign to promote awareness of the dangers of riding in the rear of utilities and trucks and the forthcoming ban on open load space travel. This campaign features Aboriginal people and is told as a story.<sup>13</sup> The campaign includes visual material – a 30 second advertisement – as well as written material – brochures and posters.

The Office for Road Safety has developed a 30 second advertisement starring Mary G and Bamba. This is available in radio and television formats. It is airing in October to December 2005.

The media schedule was defined by a demographic analysis of the regions with the highest Aboriginal populations. The result is that the advertisement will air:

- Kimberly – On Aboriginal radio and television;
- Pilbara – On Aboriginal radio and television;
- Central Desert – On Aboriginal radio and television;
- Narrogin – On mainstream regional television and Aboriginal radio;
- Geraldton – On mainstream regional television and Aboriginal radio.

Copies of the advertisement are available from the Office of Road Safety.

Additionally, supporting material in the form of posters and brochures have been distributed to:

- Regional and metropolitan branches of the Federal Indigenous Coordination Centres;
- Aboriginal health services;
- RoadWise community road safety officers;

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart C. Garrow, 'Vehicle Crash Mortality in the Kimberley Region, 1990 to 1994: the Role of Open-Load Space Passengers in Utility Trucks', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 21.3 (1997) 341.

<sup>12</sup> L. Rina Cercarelli and Laurine M. Cooper, *Process Evaluation of the Open Load Space Project, July 1999 to March 2000* (Road Accident Prevention Research Unit, Department of Public Health, University of Western Australia, 2000) 40.

<sup>13</sup> Robert J. Donovan, *Social Marketing: Principles and Practice* (Melbourne: IP Communications, 2003) 278.

- Regional and metropolitan branches of the State Department of Indigenous Affairs;
- Aboriginal communities in Western Australia;
- Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and South Australia which are close to the Western Australian border.

## **7 Conclusion**

Travel in open load spaces has been a significant issue in Western Australia. This has been particularly marked in regional areas, probably attributable to the greater use of utilities outside the metropolitan area. About 75% of car casualties were injured in crashes occurring in Perth while only 35% of people injured in utility crashes were in Perth.<sup>14</sup>

The introduction of the requirement that people ride in rollover cages on the rear of trucks and utilities in 2001 appears to have reduced the fatality rate for open load space travel. It is anticipated that the 2006 complete ban on open load space travel will further reduce fatalities and injuries.

In order to smoothly implement this ban and to raise awareness of the dangers of open load space travel, the Office of Road Safety is distributing written brochures to the owners of every registered truck, utility and panel van in Western Australia.

Open load space travel is acknowledged as a particular issue for Aboriginal people in Western Australia. In order to reduce the disproportionate number of deaths and injuries caused by open load space travel among Aboriginal groups, the Office of Road Safety has developed an indigenous-focussed, culturally-specific advertising campaign.

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<sup>14</sup> Cercarelli and Kirov, *Utility Crashes in Western Australia, 1987 – 1997* (1999) 17.

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**Abstract:**

On 1 January 2001 it became illegal to ride in the open load space of vehicles without rollover cages in Western Australia. On 1 January 2004 the Department of Planning and Infrastructure ceased to authorise the fitting of rollover cages, and from 1 January 2006 there will be a blanket prohibition on travel in open load spaces.

The regulation of travel in the open load space of vehicles was introduced because of concerns over the deaths and injuries resulting from this dangerous practice. This paper examines the impact of the partial ban on riding in open load spaces in Western Australia and represents an interim evaluation of the project.

Additionally, this paper focuses on the impact of the partial ban on Aboriginal road safety. Aboriginal people are over-represented in road crashes involving open load space travel. In recognition of this, the Office of Road Safety developed an education campaign on the forthcoming ban on open load space travel aimed at Indigenous audiences in Western Australia.