

## **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FLEET SAFETY PROJECT**

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### **Biography**

Shane Pope worked in the hospitality industry after leaving school and commenced a Bachelor of Science at Edith Cowan University in 2001.

Shane completed a Bachelor of Health Science (majoring in Health Promotion) in 2005. He was successful in receiving a Healthway Graduate Scholarship from the Australian Health Promotion Association to work on a six-month fleet safety project at the WA Local Government Association's RoadWise Program in 2006.

Shane continued employment with the WA Local Government Association and is currently the Regional Road Safety Officer in the Metropolitan North region of Perth. Shane is also an Executive Committee member of the Australian Health Promotion Association's WA branch and the WA branch of the Australasian College of Road Safety.

### **Abstract**

Road crashes are the most common cause of work-related death, injury and absence from work in Australia. In Western Australia between 1999/2000 and 2003/04 there was an annual average of 489 lost time claims due to work-related crashes each year and 11 deaths making up 45% of all work related fatalities (WorkCover WA 2006).

In Western Australian the collective Local Government fleet is substantial, with 138 Local Governments surveyed having 14,576 vehicles worth \$460 million. During the period 1995 to 2005, there were 340 injury claims related to road crashes in Local Government fleet vehicles and in the past five years vehicle damage claims worth more than \$11 million dollars were recorded.

This report looks at an innovative approach to workplace-related road crashes within the Local Government sector in Western Australia.

Integrating fleet policies into an occupational safety and health (OSH) framework to reduce the risk of injury and death, reduce costs (Seljak and Maddock 2002) and protect an organisation in relation to OSH regulations (Murray, Newman, Watson, Davey and Schonfeld 2003).

Background research, baseline data, a demonstration project and a reference group of diverse Local Government representatives helped guide the development of a resource kit containing model policies based on 'best practice', to assist Local Governments in adopting fleet safety policies.

This approach will be of interest to fleet managers and the resource kit suitable for application within the public or private sector.

**Key Words:** fleet safety, Local Government, policy, workplace, road safety

## **Introduction**

This paper reports on an innovative approach taken to workplace-related road crashes within the Local Government sector in Western Australia.

The Local Government Fleet Safety Project began as a six-month Australian Health Promotion Association/Healthway funded graduate scholarship project implemented through the WA Local Government Association's (WALGA) RoadWise Program. The project looked at an holistic approach to work related road crashes in the Local Government sector in Western Australia. The approach taken was to support the Local Government sector to adopt 'best practice' policies and procedures in relation to the work environment (fleet vehicles) and behavioural aspects of workplace road safety.

As a member of the Road Safety Council, the WA Local Government Association through the RoadWise Program, aims to contribute to the long term vision of eliminating road crashes as a major cause of premature death and injury, by increasing community

support, partnerships and participation in the implementation of Arriving Safely: Road Safety Strategy for Western Australia 2003-2007.

The Program consists of a community road safety network, supported by Regional Road Safety Officers who work with Local Governments, RoadWise Committees and road safety partner agencies at the local level, providing an ideal avenue to introduce the concept of fleet and workplace safety.

The Road Safety Council in WA, similar to other jurisdictions, has embraced the Safe Systems Approach to road safety. The approach allows for human error and aims to reduce death and serious injury by minimising the force of impact the human body suffers in a crash.

This project focused on the principles associated with 'safer vehicles', as one of the four major components of a Safe System; safer drivers in safer vehicles, travelling on safer roads at safer travel speeds. Including the development of model policies and demonstration projects to inform and encourage Local Governments to adopt road safety and vehicle purchasing policies focused on safety.

Background research, baseline data, a demonstration project and a reference group of diverse Local Government representatives helped guide the development of a resource kit containing model policies based on 'best practice', to assist Local Governments in adopting fleet safety policies.

### **The Case for Adopting Fleet Safety Policies**

Road crashes are the most common cause of work-related death, injury and absence from work in Australia.

In Western Australia between 1999-2000 and 2003-2004 there was an annual average of 11 deaths and 489 lost time claims due to work-related crashes making up 45% of all work related fatalities in that time (WorkCover WA 2006).

In Western Australia Local Government's collective fleet is substantial, with the 138 (of 144) Local Governments surveyed having a total of 14,576 vehicles worth \$459 million. Over \$11 million worth of vehicle damage claims were recorded between 2000 and 2005, at an average cost of \$2008 per claim and costing \$13,623 per Local Government each year. The average total cost to Councils in the Perth metropolitan area is nearly triple that of non-metropolitan Local Governments.

In terms of injury there were 340 claims between 1995 and 2005 resulting in an average of 28 days lost and \$6,742 per claim. During this period there was one work-related fatal crash recorded.

As a legal obligation and 'duty of care', employers are obliged to provide a safe workplace and systems of work, along with safety information, instruction, training and supervision (Murray, Newman, Watson, Davey and Schonfeld 2003). A workplace is defined as a place in which a person works, thus, a vehicle is classed as a workplace where it is used for employment purposes (Haworth, Tingvall and Kowaldo 2000). Therefore, it is important that fleet safety policies be incorporated into an organisation's occupational safety and health (OSH) framework

Currently there is a lack of integration between OSH legislation and road safety legislation with workplace vehicle use generally seen as a road safety issue. Integrating a fleet safety management system into an OHS framework can reduce the risk of injury and death, reduce costs (Seljack & Maddock 2002) and protect an organisation in relation to OSH regulations (Murray et al 2003).

Other concerns besides legal obligation and a 'duty of care' that provide a rationale for adopting fleet safety policies are:

#### *Social Reasons*

The introduction of a fleet safety policy can have a positive effect whereby workers develop a safer driving culture away from work, setting an example and influencing their families (Murray et al 2003). Fleet operators in Australia purchased 72% of new Fords and Holdens and 61% of new Toyotas and Mitsubishis in 1997 (Haworth et al 2000). The collective buying power of fleet operators in the marketplace can help speed up the

introduction of effective safety features (Haworth et al 2000). These safer fleet vehicles will integrate into the wider community after two to three years and eventually make safety features more cost effective due to public demand (Murray et al 2003).

#### *Business Reasons*

A fleet safety policy can help an organisation stay ahead of regulations and offer good public relations as a leader in road safety initiatives (Murray et al 2003). The business benefits from the introduction of fleet safety policies can include:

- Improved productivity
- Enhanced quality of service
- Improved employee relations
- Reduced costs (vehicle damage/insurance)
- A better public image
- Compliance with OSH regulations
- Off-the-job awareness.

(Murray et al 2003)

#### *Financial Reasons*

Crash costs cut into the budget of an organisation with average repair costs being around \$2000 (Wheatley 1997) and an average total cost of \$18 500 (Stewart-Bogle 1999). Work-related crashes cost Australia \$425 million per year (Stewart-Bogle 1999) and the cost is shared 40% by employees, 30% by employers and 30% by the community (Wheatley 1997).

#### *Raising the Bar*

The twelve member Councils of the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) developed an induction resource *Improving Driver & Vehicle Safety: FleetSafe policy and guidelines for Local Government in the Southern Sydney Region*. The resource aims to provide drivers with practical information and advice to help prevent fleet crashes and improve road safety in organisational fleets.

The City of Armadale in Western Australia adopted a comprehensive *FleetSafety System* in 2003 in response to a severe work related crash. There was an observed 14%

decrease in workplace related road crashes first year of adopting the policy with a further 12% decrease the following year. This resulted in significant insurance premium reductions allowing the program to expand and become sustainable.

The Frankston City Council in Victoria developed a Fleet Management Plan in response to rising costs of fleet management. Despite an increase in incidents in 2005/2006 due to improved reporting, there was a 9% reduction in repair costs compared to the corporate average. This is the second consecutive year in which costs have been decreased from the previous year with an overall decrease of 44% since 2004/2005 when the Fleet Management Plan was implemented.

### **Aim**

The primary aim of the Local Government Fleet Safety Project was to research and develop a resource kit based on 'best practice' containing model policies, to encourage Western Australian Local Governments to adopt holistic fleet and workplace road safety policies and practices.

### **Objectives**

The four key objectives of the Local Government Fleet Safety Project were to:

- collect baseline data relevant to WA Local Government Fleets to quantify the size and extent of fleets as well as issues and opportunities for fleet safety;
- develop a resource kit for Road Safety Officers and Local Government staff as a guide in the development of individually tailored workplace road safety and fleet safety policies;
- develop a comprehensive communication strategy and plan to encourage Local Governments to adopt fleet safety policies, and
- design and deliver an orientation workshop to train RoadWise Regional Road Safety Officers in the use of the resource kit.

### **Target Group**

The target group for the Local Government Fleet Safety Project was the diverse range of WA Local Governments in metropolitan, rural and remote areas.

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government. An independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 142 Local Governments statewide. The WALGA's RoadWise team has worked closely with Local Governments for more than a decade and so has a well established positive working relationship with individual Local Governments. A key consideration of the project was to develop a resources that would be suitable for the needs of Local Government fleets of all sizes.

## **The Process**

### *Data Collection*

No analysis of data relevant to WA Local Government fleet issues had previously been undertaken in WA. Baseline data specific to WA Local Government fleets was collated using insurance claims, to develop a comprehensive report that highlighted workplace road safety issues and opportunities to improve. Zurich Insurance Services Australia (vehicle crash data) and Local Government Insurance Services (injury data) provided the raw claim data for the report.

The report, *Workplace Road Safety Issues in Western Australian Local Government Fleets*, covered fleet size and value, vehicle damage claims (cost, cause, time of day and vehicle type) and injury claims (cost, cause, type of injury and days lost). As incidences of minor damage and near misses are not evident in insurance claims, the report does not show the full extent of the problem.

### *Development of the Resource Kit*

The fundamental component of the project was the development of a resource kit to assist Local Governments in adopting fleet safety policies. The resource kit containing model policies was based on 'best practice' and was designed to become a 'living' document.

Local Governments in Australia with existing fleet safety policies and road safety authorities were consulted to develop a draft resource kit based on 'best practice'. The seven elements of fleet safety prescribed by Queensland Transport and the WA Road Safety Council formed the basis for the draft resource kit, which includes:

- Integrating Fleet Safety Policies into an OSH framework,
- Taking Road Safety into Account when Recruiting and Selecting New Staff
- Developing a Road Safety Induction for Staff
- Informed Choice Based on Safety when Purchasing and Maintaining Vehicles
- Data Collection on Fleet, Drivers and Incidences
- Reinforcement of Fleet Safety through Incentives and Disincentives
- Training, Education and Development Programs

(Queensland Transport 1998; Road Safety Council<sup>1</sup> n.d; and Road Safety Council 2001)

It was important to develop a resource that was based on 'best practice' and was relevant to all WA Local Government fleets. To achieve this, a Reference Group consisting of representatives from a range of WA Local Governments and WALGA Policy and Services team members was established to review and guide development of the resource kit.

Stakeholders in the project were offered input into the contents of the resource kit with those returning comment believing the kit was comprehensive and relevant to Local Government fleets.

Other features of the resource kit included a compact disk containing an electronic copy of the main document, model policies, existing demonstration policies and a matrix for researching vehicle safety inserted on the inside cover of the folder.

### *Communication Strategy*

Opportunities were taken to speak to Local Government representatives in the development stage of the project at various seminars and workshops about the importance of Local Governments adopting fleet safety policies. Audiences included Local Government staff involved in developing fleet safety policies (fleet managers,



operational managers) and the decision makers (Chief Executive Officers and Elected Members).

The presentations outlined the serious nature of workplace related road crashes in Australia, Local Government fleet safety issues, 'best practice' when adopting fleet safety policies and the financial benefits of adopting fleet safety policies.

The success of existing Local Government fleet safety policies (used as demonstration projects) and the delivery of the communication strategy generated considerable interest in fleet safety policies with more than 15 Local Governments requesting a resource kit prior to the launch. The resource kit was also requested by Councils in other States prior to the launch.

#### *Workshop Training*

RoadWise Regional Road Safety Officers were integral in the roll out of the project, promoting awareness and understanding of how to use the resource kit and assisting Local Governments to adopt fleet safety policies. An orientation workshop was developed as a means of training the Regional Road Safety Officers in the delivery of the project. This process also allowed the Regional Road Safety Officers to contribute to the resource kit in the early draft stages, giving them a sense of ownership and ensuring they would be comfortable using and promoting the resource. A range of promotional and communication tools were developed to assist the officers in delivering the project. .

#### *Roll Out*

The *Fleet Safety Resource Kit* was launched in December 2006 after extensive consultation, communication and training in the use of the resource. Stakeholders with an interest in Local Government fleet safety attended the official launch by the WALGA President Bill Mitchell with guest speaker Mervyn Rea, Zurich Risk Engineer.

Rather than posting the resource kit to each Local Government, the focus was on Regional Road Safety Officers approaching each Local Government individually. By speaking to fleet managers, OSH coordinators and human resource staff directly, the Regional Road Safety Officers were able to highlight the various features of the resource

in a more personalised manner. Regional Road Safety Officers were provided with collated fleet insurance data for individual Local Governments to help provide a rationale for adopting fleet safety policies and assist Local Governments in identifying priority areas within their fleet.

### **Where to from here**

Since the launch of the Local Government Fleet Safety Project in December 2006, two Local Governments have adopted a comprehensive fleet safety policy and more than 30 Local Governments have introduced fleet safety policies to varying degrees, relevant to their current needs. The rates of vehicle damage and workplace road related injury measured against baseline data will be evaluated for each Local Government to help further identify what is 'best practice' in Local Government fleets.

The project will continue to be promoted and the resource kit made available beyond the Local Government sector; effectively expanding the reach of the project. In this way the success of fleet safety policies in Local Government fleets will act as a catalyst to encourage other organisations to adopt similar fleet safety policies. Ultimately contributing to: a safer culture of driving at and away from work, the uptake of vehicles with safety features, and a reduction in work related injury and death in Western Australia.

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