

Safer Vehicles: Is our own house in order?

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Abstract

Traffic and Highway Patrol Command (THPC) is responsible for road policing in New South Wales. There are some 1,400 people in the command and vehicles owned by THPC workers represent a private vehicle fleet of well over 2,000 vehicles.

This project represents a health check on the safety of vehicles owned and driven by those civilian and police employees and their families, as well as their awareness of the safer vehicles pillar.

Background

Speaking at the annual state Road Policing Conference in August 2017, Mr Bernard Carlon, Executive Director of the NSW Centre for Roads Safety, said that only one third of light vehicles on NSW roads are rated at 5-Stars by the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP).

About the same time as Mr Carlon's address, separate incidents occurred where THPC members were injured in road crashes whilst travelling to work.

Aim

This gave rise to these questions of whether our workers and their loved ones have the highest level of occupant protection when driving those 2,000+ private vehicles.

It is in the interests of all employers to reduce crash severity regardless of whether workers are on or off duty.

Method

This study used an 11-question survey accessible via Survey Monkey, promoted in the command's monthly newsletter and followed up by an email to staff. For the first 10 questions, respondents could select from one of the pre-defined answers. The last question was a free text field where respondents could share any personal experiences.

The survey was open for 16 days in late 2017. Responses were voluntary and anonymous.

Results

The survey received 172 responses, seven of which came from civilian staff. This was a pleasing figure as it equates to around 20% of the workforce considering absences over the period.

The results suggest that road policing professionals are more aware of this safety system pillar than the wider community.

Findings include:

- 57% of respondents drive a private vehicle that is 5-Star rated, far above the 1/3 figure for the overall NSW light vehicle fleet
- For 60% of respondents, at least one vehicle is 5-Star rated
- In the 55 households with driving aged children, 61% of households, children of workers always drive or mostly drive a 5-Star vehicle
- In 82% of cases, vehicle safety was a factor in deciding what car to buy
- 30% of respondents cited cost as a barrier to purchasing newer, safer vehicles
- 3% of respondents were not concerned with the issue of vehicle safety

Only a quarter of respondents drive a vehicle that is older than the average age of the Australian vehicle fleet of 10 years (www.abs.gov.au) noting that 14% reported being performance/classic car owners.

The most highway patrol officer paygrade is over \$100,000 per year. Even so, cost was cited as a barrier to the purchase of a newer, 5-star rated vehicle.

Some 80% of respondents who are parents have discussed vehicle safety with their driving-aged children.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this survey were reported to THPC members in the command newsletter. If the result is that our workers upgrade their vehicles then it would be a win-win: workers would reduce injury outcomes in a crash and the command would see a reduction in crash-related workplace absences.

Large firms and government departments could improve work and road safety through this type of process that aligns safe systems with corporate safe driving policies. Employers can also show leadership and buy only 5-star vehicles. THPC demonstrated this by rejecting the ANCAP 2-Star Ford Mustang for highway patrol service. This policy may have influenced THPC workers in their purchasing decisions and could be explored further.

Traffic and Highway Patrol Command does have its own house in order with a workforce that is championing the case for safer vehicles. The broader challenge is bridging the gap between road policing professionals and the wider community to drive up the take-up of 5-star vehicles.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/9309.0.