NRSPP
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM

Thought Leadership: Road Safety Management Systems

We never catch a plane, train or ferry operated without a safety management system, but don't think twice when it comes to the road – the most dangerous transport system

If we understood a century ago what we know now, we would of course never have left the road transport system to evolve as it did. Road transport has directly facilitated the high income prosperity Australians enjoy today, but it has also left tens of thousands Australians dead, and many more seriously injured. It will be some time before we recover from the unsafe legacy systems we put in place and the entrenched culture of blame which was fostered.

But we are on the way and now acknowledge the need to consider the safety of the road transport system as a whole. The "safe system" approach is built on an understanding that the design and management of the system directly impacts upon the safety experienced by its users, and an ethical rejection of death and serious injury as a by product of improved mobility. What was once considered an issue of individual competence, and became a public health concern for governments, is increasingly recognised as a major corporate risk for organisations.

Road safety management for organisations

Many organisations are wrestling with how they can respond to the growing expectation of safe road transport. For example, Austroads will shortly publish a study on road safety management systems. The study includes a survey of state/national and local government entities which manage road networks across Australia and New Zealand, and highlighted a lack of safety assurance practices. This is not to say that these road agencies are not concerned with safety – they are. But the safety management systems they have in place are demonstrably insufficient.

Safety management systems are at the heart of how other, much safer, transport modes are organised. Walk into any major aviation, maritime or rail operator and you will find formally documented and actively applied safety management systems. These continuous improvement management systems not only ensure the safety of the transport infrastructure or services the company provides, but also provide external assurance of the safety which the client and the general public can expect. They are critical to the company's success.

Many different public and private organisations have a major role to play in road safety. Aside from road

agencies which deliver the infrastructure, vehicle manufacturers which build the motor vehicles, or transport companies which provide the freight and passenger services, the road presents the single greatest risk of death by injury in the Australian workplace. The decisions that organisations make about their employees use of the road network, and the commercial arrangements they make with transport companies, can have a positive or a negative effect on road safety. They can be haphazard or systematic in relation to safety. They can focus on compliance with the law or on the safety of the communities they operate within.

Awareness is rising, and through the National Road Safety Partnership Program commercial organisations are sharing their successes in road safety with other likeminded companies through a formal network. Motivation for these companies to participate in the program is linked to the dividend of a safer workplace, to customer loyalty, decreased operating costs, a more skilled workforce, and enhanced brand recognition.

Effective safety management systems are no different to controls a company may put in place to manage financial or other corporate risks – they are effective in reducing losses and increasing profit. They are relevant to the size and operations of the business, and they become part of organisational culture – "how we do things around here".

The new standard in road safety management systems

The International Standards Organisation released ISO 39001 Road Traffic Safety Management Systems to the market in late 2012. It represents best practice in the area by combining the recognised discipline of a quality management systems approach with the world's best knowledge of road safety management. Road safety management is Pillar One of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, and the plan specifically references the need to promote ISO 39001 as a road safety management initiative.

The Standard is integrated with the safe system approach to road safety, and has been developed to assist organisations to reduce and ultimately eliminate death and serious injury arising from use of the road network. It is relevant in many different organisational contexts – large, small, public, private, regulatory, commercial – throughout low, middle and high income countries.

ISO 39001 follows a simple quality management cycle of plan-do-check-act. In broad terms, an organisation seeking accreditation to ISO 39001 must go through a development process to:

- Understand the road safety context and influence of the organisation
- Establish organisational commitment to safety and systems to achieve it
- Determine relevant safety performance factors
- Establish objectives and plans
- Resource and implement plans, and
- Measure, review and continually improve performance.

The Standard gives prominence to leadership commitment to the elimination of death and serious injury on the road, and to the specification of results derived from the following safety factors:

- Road design and safe speed
- Use of appropriate roads
- Use of personal safety equipment
- Using safe driving speed
- Fitness of drivers
- Safe journey planning
- Safety of vehicles
- Appropriate driver/vehicle authorisations
- Removal of vehicles/drivers, and
- Post-crash preparedness and response.

Those organisations which are already accredited to ISO management standards will find it easier to gain certification. Experience in the development of similar management standards, such as ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems, suggests that not all organisations which develop and implement a road safety management system will continue to get third party accreditation, but that the process itself and the decisions and investment it generates will provide safety value to an organisation. Whether accredited or simply aligned with ISO 39001, the road safety management systems which emerge will vary according to the size of the organisation and the scope of activity encompassed by the management system. The scale of investment, the speed of implementation and the ease of maintenance will be important considerations for every different organisation.

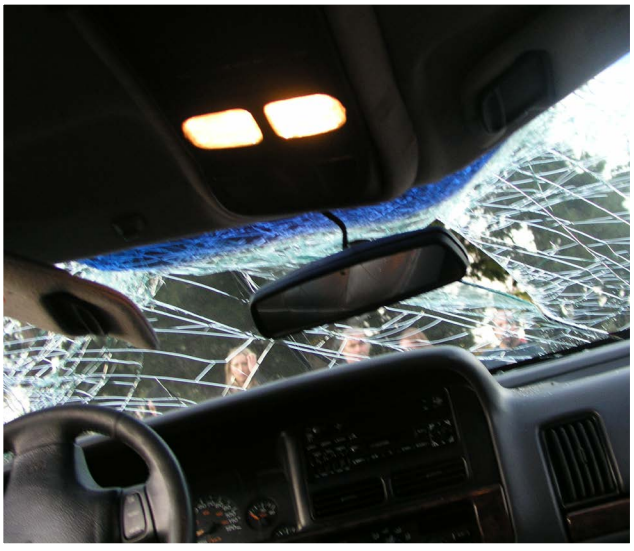
Some ways forward

We need to build the expectation that organisations will embrace systematic responses in place to address the risk of death and serious injury on the road, and leave behind the notion that it is up to individual road users, or indeed governments. Using ISO 39001 as a guide for critical safety actions, three major opportunities are discussed here:

1. Give work related road trauma the prominence it demands in occupational safety, and apply occupational safety disciplines to its prevention

The reasons for the lack of prominence given to work related road trauma are not clear, but are likely to be associated with public safety on the road having been identified for decades as an individual or a governmental problem. It is only just now being identified as an organisational problem. While there are some outstanding examples of private corporations taking responsibility for the work related road trauma problem, occupational safety regulators have tended to focus on other issues.

Modern road safety management is increasingly well aligned with occupational safety principles (as with the hierarchy of control, the main focus of attention is increasingly design and technology) and this approach is not sustainable. Indeed, poor information, analysis, options and profile regarding work related road trauma may actually reinforce the notion that injury risk on the road is not an occupational safety issue which organisations need to take seriously. Certainly, official reporting in the area is sparse, and the way it is reported regularly changes making any tracking and analysis difficult. This could be addressed by regulators, business and unions collaborating on major studies into the significance of work related road trauma, and the preparation of good practice guidance for the range of situations in which organisations are exposed to and generate safety risks on the road.



2. Discuss the big safety management issues in commercial road transport, and then look at compliance and enforcement mechanisms to suit

Safety is the core purpose of regulating commercial transport of passengers and freight, but arguably compliance with prescriptive rules has become the focus. We are a long way from the safety management systems and co-regulatory focused approaches in much safer modes of commercial transport. The National Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme for example provides some mechanisms for looking at a company as a whole, but only relates to vehicle mass and maintenance, driver fatigue and vehicle roadworthiness – that is, only a small portion of the safety management equation. Transport and logistics industry groupings have established their own codes of practice, but these too need to be assessed against the internationally recognised standard for safe road transport management.

Having got through its establishment phase, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator has a significant opportunity to undertake a first principles review of safety management expectations and practices in relation to commercial road transport operations. A sustained period of investment is required into a collaborative reform program which places the safety management systems of transport companies at the heart of safety improvement initiatives. The current compliance and enforcement framework won't cut it. A modern safety management approach needs to be developed over time which is more consistent with the safe system philosophy, and more capable of realising the ultimate safety goal.

3. Demonstrate the value of road safety management systems in the market

Whether big or small, public or private, organisations with significant risk exposure on the road are likely to come under increasing scrutiny regarding the safety of their operations. A collection of well-intentioned policies and individuals can make progress, but it is very easy for safety decisions to be made on the run, and for good money to be spent on poorly conceived programs that don't address the underlying risks. The question is which companies want to develop or strengthen safety management systems that put them ahead of the curve on a problem which can cut quickly and deeply into an organisation's position within the community.

Road safety management systems are not a panacea to organisational safety performance. However, the process of developing a road safety management system which is relevant to the organisation, which addresses real rather than perceived risks with actions which are backed by evidence rather than anecdote, will give any organisation a greater chance of eliminating death and serious injury in the community. ISO 39001 provides the template, developed collaboratively between governments, business, consumers and academics, which allows organisations in Australia to demonstrate their safety credentials like no other.

The demand for safety is increasing. Those organisations which introduce a stronger systems based approach to reducing safety risks on the road will be better placed to meet that demand and sustain their position within the community.

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