



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOUR-WHEEL DRIVERS FACE GREATER RISK OF ACCIDENTS, SAYS ROAD SAFETY EXPERT

Drivers put themselves and their passengers at greater risk when they get behind the wheel of a four-wheel-drive vehicle, one of the Australia's foremost road safety experts has warned.

Associate Professor Andry Rakotonirainy, of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety at Queensland University (CARRS-Q), said a recent experiment conducted by the University showed that drivers exhibit significantly different driving habits depending upon the type of vehicle they are driving.

"We put the same drivers on the same stretch of road in a sedan and a 4WD vehicle, and we found that when a person drives a 4WD they tend to accelerate more quickly away from a standing position, and decelerate later when they want to stop," Dr Rakotonirainy said.

"Unless drivers become more aware of their tendency to accelerate and decelerate more quickly in a 4WD, they face a significantly greater risk of having an accident – particularly when they are on rough or slippery roads," he said.

Dr Rakotonirainy, Director of CARRS-Q's Intelligent Transport System-Human Factor Research Program, was speaking at the Australian Pipeline Industry Association's (APIA) Safety Field Day, held in Victoria this week.

The event provided a unique gathering of pipeline operators and constructors, fleet managers and road safety experts – all united in their desire to make Australia's more remote roads a safer place.

Dr Rakotonirainy is currently involved in a pioneering project to develop an electronic monitoring device that evaluates the performance of 4WD training vehicles – and provides an instant warning if the driver is jeopardising their safety.

With a grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC), the project has seen CARRS-Q team up with the Melbourne-based driver training organisation, Murcotts Driving Excellence, QFleet, the Queensland Government's provider of vehicle leasing and fleet management services, and the Queensland-based driver training technology company, Vigil Systems.

"We have been working with a range of government organisations, and if all goes according to plan, we should have a prototype of this device ready in 2009," Dr Rakotonirainy said.

Dr Rakotonirainy's presentation was one of five at the APIA event, which attracted about 80 industry representatives for a unique day of hands-on 4WD instruction and road safety training at the Melbourne 4X4 Training and Proving Ground at Werribee.

Speakers included Professor Raphael Grzebieta, Acting Director of the NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre at the University of NSW, and Alan Close, Managing Director of remote area paramedic service, LifeAid Emergency Care.

The event provided a unique opportunity for pipeline operators and constructors to meet with fleet managers, road safety experts and other stakeholders to discuss opportunities to improve remote-area road safety, advocate for greater vehicle safety standards, and promote opportunities for formal 4WD training facilities.

“This was a great chance for industry representatives, road safety specialists and other stakeholders to get together to discuss ways of improving road safety – particularly 4WD safety in remote parts of Australia,” Dr Rakotonirainy said.

APIA Safety Committee Chairman, Mr Mark Twycross, said the event had provided a unique networking opportunity for remote-area operators and other stakeholders concerned with improving the safety of their employees.

“Within the next month, representatives from APIA will be going to meet with both Professor Grzebieta and Dr Rakotonirainy, and we will be sharing our project data with them in an effort to support their vital research,” Mr Twycross said.

“We are positive that in the not-so-distant future, we will be seeing this research translate into safer off-road driving conditions for all remote-area construction operations,” he said.

APIA has plans to hold similar Safety Field Days in other States over the next 12-18 months, which may ultimately lead to the creation of a formal APIA Training Centre for specialised off-road driving instruction.

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