



MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA NEEDS URGENT “LIFESAVING” VEHICLE ROLLOVER SAFETY STANDARD: ROAD EXPERT

A formal industry “rollover crashworthiness” standard that would lead to stronger vehicle roofs could help to save hundreds of drivers and passengers from life-threatening, spinal and head injuries, a leading road safety expert said today.

Professor Raphael Grzebieta, Chair of Road Safety at the NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre at the University of NSW, and President of the Australasian College of Road Safety, today called for a manufacturing standard - commonly known as an Australian Design Rule or ADR - to be introduced in Australia to help strengthen vehicle roofs.

“More than 250 Australians a year face the risk of serious injury or fatality as a result of rollover crashes,” Prof. Grzebieta told delegates attending the Australian Pipeline Industry Association’s (APIA) Safety Field Day in Victoria today.

“But because of the lack of a simple manufacturing ADR, even if you make your roof out of spaghetti, it is still legal,” he said.

Prof. Grzebieta is part of a research team that is introducing a dynamic rollover crash testing procedure that he believes could help federal regulatory authorities formulate a lifesaving national rollover crashworthiness design rule that would result in increased vehicle roof strength.

The research has attracted funding from the WA Office of Road Safety and the Road Transport Authority of NSW as well as Federal Government support via the Australian Research Council grant scheme.

“Around 20% of vehicle occupant fatalities result directly from vehicle rollovers, and that figure goes up to one in three when we count crashes where the vehicle has rolled over either before or after hitting a roadside hazard or colliding with another vehicle,” Prof. Grzebieta said.

“But despite these figures, we do not have any standards to reduce rollover crash injuries,” he said.

“We have standards for side impacts and frontal impacts, but not for rollovers – all because vehicle manufacturers do not want to strengthen their roofs.

“It’s estimated that 25% of all spinal injuries are caused by this lack of an ADR,” he said.

“I’m calling for authorities within Australia as well as internationally to introduce a dynamic rollover crashworthiness mandatory test procedure that protects vehicle occupants in the event of a rollover crash.”

Prof. Grzebieta said there was a safety standard in the United States for vehicle roofs, but that it had “actually resulted in increasing deaths because it is so weak and inappropriate.”

“The strength to vehicle weight ratio for roof crush we would require is somewhere in the order of four times or greater, but the standard in the US has been set at 1.5 times,” he said.

“Because of this, any residual strength in older vehicles has been designed out and it’s actually made matters much worse.”

Prof. Grzebieta said that, as well as appealing to federal authorities to introduce a national rollover crashworthiness design rule, his organisation will also be applying pressure to consumer testing bodies such as the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) to adopt the crash test procedure to rate the rollover crashworthiness of vehicles if an ADR is not introduced.

Major vehicle manufacturers will then need to respond to consumer demand for the safer vehicles.

About 80 industry representatives are attending APIA’s Safety Field Day today at the Melbourne 4X4 Training and Proving Ground at Werribee, where they will receive advice and guidance from some of the country’s leading road safety experts.

The Safety Field Day will also provide participants with an opportunity to test-drive 4X4 vehicles, study accident avoidance techniques, and learn how to integrate safety considerations into their fleet purchasing and equipping practices.

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