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On the right track

Three years after Tamil Nadu formulated the Road Safety Policy, there is little sign of a reversal in the growing incidence of road accidents. At any given time, pedestrians compete for space with a dizzying variety of vehicles and the occasional stray animal. A spectacle of sound and fury, Indian roads are highways to hell with road-users pouring themselves into every possible inch of road in an effort to move forward, while helmets and seat belts take a backseat. Pillion riders, most of them women and children are the main casualties in urban areas; compared to 2008, a thousand more people, died last year in road accidents. We spoke to activists and doctors on how to reverse the trend and make travel safe.

Address core issues

Over the 10 years of Suraksha Road Safety Society's existence, our focus has been school children. Our study conducted jointly with IIT-Madras on pedestrian safety in T. Nagar has helped us focus on four core issues. The first is clearing 200 yards outside and around the schools of hawkers so that footpaths are accessible to the children. The second is that we work at promoting exclusive cycle lanes at least in areas where feasible. This will lessen road mishaps. Thirdly, and more importantly, we want traffic safety lessons to be mandatory in schools. And lastly, we insist that every school appoint a transport officer. The Government must insist on car-pooling to save fuel and road space, and in a country where road etiquette receives low priority, change should begin at the grass-roots level.



USHA SESHASAYEE

President

Suraksha Road Safety Society, Chennai

Emergency response systems

Though numerous road safety policies and guidelines such as the Sunder Committee Report have been prepared by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, no comprehensive road policy has been implemented in India. The onus then falls on local governments to sensitise road users. Presently, there is no post-crash management (PCM) system anywhere in our country. A survey conducted by the World Road Safety Partnership (WRSP), which is involved in developing community-based road safety awareness programmes, reveals that more than 30 per cent of deaths and 55 per cent of permanent injuries in road accidents are due to improper handling of casualties during rescue operations or while transporting to hospitals. We need an emergency response system, with trained paramedics, efficient highway patrol and fire and rescue personnel. As a woman, I feel the focus should be on advocating non-aggressive driving, the use of helmets, seat belts and adherence to traffic rules.



JOLLY VARGHESE

Executive Director

WRSP, Thiruvananthapuram

Encourage public transportation

There are no viable and convenient public transport systems in our cities, except perhaps in Mumbai. The thrust should be on efficiently-run and clean buses, trains, and other modes of public transport. Vehicular traffic on our roads can also be reduced by dissuading the use of personal vehicles. Our lack of discipline should be dealt with, and traffic laws implemented strictly. I wish victims of accidents get speedy medical aid. Hospitals must also be 'victim friendly'. A return to civic spirit by all involved — the State, the Police, vehicle users and pedestrians will lessen road tragedies.

NILAKSHI JATAR

Founder-Member

Nagarik Chetana Manch, Pune

The golden hour

R. Adams Cowley, the father of trauma care, gave the world the concept of the golden hour. The 'golden hour' is the 60 minutes from the moment of injury, to calling an Emergency Medical Service (EMS), dispatching an ambulance, transporting the victim to a trauma centre, and performing the necessary, life-saving intervention. We see approximately 12-15 road traffic accidents per month involving children ranging from the trivial to devastating poly-trauma. Emergency services for children are a lot different from those for an adult. The sound of the ambulance itself reflects the cry of life; but, on our roads it is extremely difficult for ambulances to wade through traffic.

Also, it should be made mandatory that all emergency departments offer prompt care without the fear of litigation.

Also, it is essential to get the patient to the trauma centre as quickly as possible, without wasting time at the scene. The general public should be taught cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. Basic Life Support should be part of school curricula. Children learn about road safety by watching others. Make sure you always set a good example.



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