



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU - NATAL - ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU - NATALI
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
UMNYANGO WEZOKUTHUTHA

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE JOINT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND SOUTH AFRICAN BREWERIES OFFICIAL
LAUNCH OF THE ALCOHOL EVIDENTIAL TESTING CENTRE (AEC) IN
PIETRMARITZBURG.**

21 October 2009

Programme Director;
Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Executive Council;
Members of the Provincial Legislature;
Councilors;
Head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, Mr. Chris Hlabisa;
Senior SAB Executive, Dr Vincent Maphai;
All senior SAB Executives;
All Senior Officials from the Department of Transport and other various departments;
Members of the Media;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to have an occasion of this nature today. It gives a practical meaning to our road safety key message that is, to prevent, to protect and, to care for the safety of all road users on our roads. While darkness and rainy conditions ought to be common hazards that contribute towards accidents on South African roads, drunk drivers are becoming a major threat, hampering efforts to curb road fatalities.

Although, it is a known fact that, it is illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol or any other drugs, research indicates that an estimated 50% of people who die on South African roads have a blood alcohol concentration level above 0.05g per 100 milliliters, which is the maximum legal blood alcohol limit.

This is rather a staggering figure, if you consider that some 900 000 road accidents were reported to the South African Police Service in 2008 alone. Of this, at least 150 000 people were injured – and about 60 000 required hospitalization. Sadly, 14 500 of these accident victims have perished.

However, what statistics do not tell us – are the numbers of skilled workers, breadwinners, children, and women who perish on our roads. Statistics also don't tell us the number of orphans and loved ones left destitute by a preventable carnage – road accidents.

But, statistics do tell us that 85% of crashes are as a result of human error, or put differently – accidents are caused by the road user breaking a traffic law. For example, a pedestrian crossing a busy motorway, a driver overtaking on a solid barrier line or 50% (as research suggest) of the time driving under the influence of alcohol. It therefore, mind-boggles, why so many deaths and destruction of families happen under our watch? Why so many preventable deaths are caused – by us – the road users?

The estimated cost of all vehicle crashes to the South African economy in 2008 was valued at R56 billion, representing 3.5% of GDP. By comparison, the cost of crashes in developed countries stood at 1% in the same year.

This is clearly unsustainable. It does not speak to a creation of a caring society that we seek to achieve. We are fast becoming a nation of reckless, negligent, and drunken drivers. It, cannot be, that this government can continue to pump billions of rands into the consequences of those among us who can afford to drive or buy and use a vehicle.

It is morally irreprehensible for any motorist to consume alcohol and shutter the dreams of so many. If there are loopholes in the scientific methods of detecting drunk drivers' alcohol levels – here we have it now! SAB are partnering with us to save lives.

It is a perfect partnership considering the core business of the SAB. If there is a loophole in existing legal framework dealing with those who drink and drive – then we must seriously relook such law. If any law allows a motorist whose failure to obey traffic rules, and his/her vehicle kills an innocent person, but, such a driver is given a fine only – then the law is indeed a bad law. It ought to be changed – driving under the influence thereby causing an accident should be a punishable offence carrying a compulsory imprisonment.

As part of the new Alcohol Evidential Testing Centre, the SAB has given us tools including Dräger Alcotest breathalysers and a closed-circuit television network to monitor the testing process. The breathalyser machines are able to take an instant and accurate reading of the amount of alcohol in an individual's bloodstream which can be used as evidence to secure a conviction for drunk driving. The new system is expected to be used in conjunction with regular roadblocks around the province, if a breathalyser detects more than 0.24mg of alcohol per litre of oxygen on someone's breath (equivalent to the maximum legal blood alcohol limit of 0.05g per 100 milliliters of blood), a driver will be arrested, detained in a SAPS facility and charged with a criminal offence.

We know that alcohol affects one's vision, judgment, balance and reaction time. It is therefore advisable not to drink and drive at all. However, if you do drink – and we catch you – well SAB is here – sending a clear message – No more one drink for the road, finish & klaar! There is no way to sober up quickly. It is a fallacy that showers and black coffee will make you sober. Your liver has to dissipate the alcohol in your body, which happens at a rate of 0.02 mg per hour. If you are involved in a crash while you are under the influence, it will impact on your insurance payouts. Because you have committed an illegal act by driving under the influence, short-term insurers, life insurers and the Road Accident Fund ought to refuse to pay out claims.

We are grateful for the support from SAB in providing this state-of-the-art Evidential Testing Centre which is the first in the country and the first for KwaZulu-Natal. We firmly believe that this partnership will assist SAPS stations, local authorities and RTI in the

Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas to continue with their zero-tolerance approach to drunken drivers.

The Centre has been designed to cater for a smooth process of prosecution and friendly user environment with majority of the paper work undertaken electronically. The conviction rate is surely set to increase. The initiative will help to send the message that drunken driving or driving under the influence are serious offences and endanger the lives of others unnecessarily.

Therefore, law enforcement agencies must ensure that law abiding motorists and visitors to our province are protected from these drunks on the road. Drunks must be removed from our roads without any hesitation. RTI officers must not listen to any story whatsoever. No bribes, no mercy! International studies have shown that strong enforcement is the most effective way to deal firmly with drinking and driving behaviour.

The launch of this centre is timely the sense that festive season and 2010 FIFA World Cup looming.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to thank the SAB for their concern about the safety of our road users. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is fully equipped and ready to deal with any form of misbehaviour on our roads. If you think of breaking traffic laws, particularly drinking and driving, please bid your family farewell and start preparing for your long prison sentence. You may run but you cannot hide.

I thank you!