

SPEECH NOTES FOR KWAZULU-NATAL TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT ACTING HEAD, MR SIBUSISO GUMBI AT THE TRUCK DRIVER WORKSHOP IN HILLCREST.

01 August 2012

Programme Director;

Facilitators;

Labour Union Representatives;

All drivers;

Distinguished guests;

Members of the media;

Protocol Observed;

I wish to begin by apologising on behalf of our political head, the MEC for Transport, Community Safety & Liaison, Mr Willies Mchunu, who could not be with us here today to address you due to other equally important engagements.

We take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for allowing us to join you here today and to share some of our views with you on issues pertaining freight industry, especially regarding safety on our roads. We appreciate to be part of such an initiative that seeks to impact positively on the lives of our people.

We thank the Fleet Watch Truck Magazine for organising this event with the aim of bringing together truck drivers to discuss ways of going forward with safer roads for everyone. I want to concur with all of you that indeed, it is time to strengthen our intervention in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important that as drivers you realise the value you add to this country and beyond its borders. If we talk of the KwaZulu-Natal province alone, road freight activity between the ports of Durban as well as Richards Bay and the interior of South and Southern Africa on the N3 and N2 national routes accounts for more than 23 million tons worth of goods per annum.

This amounts to more than 75% of imports and exports for the whole country and the region moving through this province, with the N3 National route between Durban and Gauteng being the busiest road freight route on the continent.

On the other hand, as the Department we have realised that the developments and opportunities in road freight transport since the inception of democracy in our country have led to tight competition in the trucking industry. The vehicle population has increased and companies have become profit driven, tending to overload vehicles, neglect vehicle maintenance and promote working conditions that compel drivers to speed on the road.

Our study reveals that about 60% of the road damage is caused by the overloaded trucks. The road traffic act stipulates that the load should not exceed 46 000kg and the height should not exceed 4,3 m.

Our Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) statistics regarding heavy vehicles on our roads reveal that in KZN alone, an average 17 000 heavy vehicles go through weighbridge of which 3000 are found to be overloaded. Some are suspended for not being worthy to be on the road, some are found unlicensed and others get warrants of arrest for unpaid fines.

Overloading makes the vehicle less stable, difficult to steer and take longer to stop. Vehicles react differently when the maximum weights which they are designed to carry are exceeded and the consequences can be fatal. It puts massive strain on vehicle tyres. Overloading can cause the tyres to overheat as well as quick wear and tear which increase the chances of blow outs.

Another critical issue is that of substance abuse which destroys millions of lives every year. Substance abuse can cause sleep deprivation, appetite loss, brain damage, depression, confusion, severe anxiety, increased heart rate, muscle spasms, kidney and liver failure. Unfortunately these are usually associated with our truck drivers.

By consuming drugs or alcohol drivers become a danger not only to themselves but also to others. Alcohol is not a stimulant, but a depressant. Therefore drinking too much often leads to both short term and long term health risks which are compounded if you are driving.

The ability of the driver to have good vision is an important part of driver fitness as the eyes control most of your movements and decisions while driving. With good vision and visual comfort you can drive safely by maintaining concentration. Mind you, many vehicle collisions are caused by a driver's poor vision.

Also, as drivers your mental alertness could be reduced because of fatigue, alcohol, drugs, boredom or general physical condition.

It is therefore important that you plan your journey well in advance, making provision for safety breaks. Do not exhaust yourself the day before a long trip. Do not take sleeping tablets the night before you have to leave on a trip. Never take any form of alcohol or drugs before embarking on a long trip. This will encourage fatigue as you become relaxed. Take a break and rest every two hours

Earlier on I spoke about companies being profit driven and creating working conditions that are unfavourable to drivers. Needless to say, an overworked and tired driver is time-bomb waiting to explode and kill people as well as damage property.

We therefore want to take this opportunity to appeal to our shop-stewards in this industry to play their part in ensuring that they engage employees on the issues of safety on our roads and particularly the safety of the drivers.

To that end, we want to salute the labour federation COSATU KwaZulu-Natal, for partnering with the KZN Departments of Transport, in ensuring that road users realise that their lives are at stake and that reckless and irresponsible behaviour on our roads can no longer be tolerated.

Together with POPCRU KwaZulu-Natal which is the COSATU affiliate, we are rolling out the campaign dubbed 'Operation Val'ingozi'. Operation Val'ingozi seeks to revive our morals and consciences as individuals who should contribute to societal safety and well-being. Our message is clear: 'Speak to your conscience, don't break the law, don't kill people'.

Our MEC uMcingwane is currently in the process of formally meeting with the labour unions in the freight industry to get them on board. We are rolling out this campaign so that it reaches all our stakeholders.

We continue to galvanise individuals and the society at large to play a role in curbing carnage on our roads. We say that accidents do not happen but they are caused and therefore preventing accidents from occurring is everyone's responsibility.

Before I conclude, it is my wish that we could see more of you here joining our Driver of the Year competition that aims to reduce the number of road accidents / fatalities involving trucks, through stimulating education amongst our heavy motor vehicle drivers and consequently improve the standard of heavy motor vehicle driving in our country.

We need to do away with the perception that South African drivers are bad drivers and show that we can be good drivers who are sensitive to road safety. We really need to improve our conduct on the road.

I urge you as drivers to always support government in its efforts to decrease road accidents. Make sure that you become part of our wellness campaigns that promote healthy lifestyle. A healthy driver means that there is a healthy nation. An unhealthy driver poses a potential road risk. Let us respect human life, and treat road carnage with the seriousness it deserves.

Finally once again, to the organisers of this event we appreciate your work well done. This has been a worthwhile exercise. Let us all go out of here and become real ambassadors of safety on our roads.

I thank you