

IAJ President's Address -
Grennell's Road Safety Expo 2013
Saturday June 15

Last year Jamaica achieved 260 fatalities on our roads totalling under 300 road fatalities in a year. This came after over ten years of trying to get below that threshold. This was good news in that we have seen fatalities go as high as 408 in 2002.

However let us not let our collective guards down as we must defend our achievements and seek to improve incrementally each year .Let us look at what we did right and keep working at it. Let us take gradual steps, as one motivational speaker would say, “ By the yard it is hard but by the inch it's a cinch.” Let us not be like the reggae boys or the West Indies team who become complacent after each small victory only to lose the game the next match.

Ladies and Gentlemen Road Safety affects everyone, drivers of both public and private transport vehicles, both motor and pedal cyclists, and of course pedestrians. It is an Equal opportunity phenomenon and it is no respecter of persons. We therefore need to have a collective response, with each one of us taking personal responsibility for making our roads safer. But how are we doing so far this year.

Through the efficiency of the Road Safety Unit we have the statistics as at the 13th of June. The numbers indicate that we are already slipping, maybe we are still celebrating last year's success. So far there have been 20 % more fatal crashes and 8 % more fatalities, this is not good news, in fact it is terrible, but let us not panic, but use these awful numbers as a call to action.

proceeds can compensate for the loss of vehicles, the lives lost are priceless. The other problem is that high insurance claims hike the cost of premiums. We are also seeing a significant increase in personal injury claims up 112% between 2007 and 2011.

The increase in the carnage on the road is not only taking loved ones and costing money, but it is impacting on the public purse. The Ministry of Health has reported that 4,749 persons were seen in the Accident and Emergency Units at the eight Government Hospitals island wide in 2011 which was 6.5% more than in 2010. The Ministry estimates that the cost of injuries from accidents account for over 35 % of the operational costs of the A and E Units totalling over a Billion dollars. The even more worrying statistic is that one in every three cancellations of scheduled surgeries is to accommodate accident emergencies. We welcome the decision by the Ministry of Health to introduce a system to monitor all injuries at public hospitals as accurate data will help us to make better decisions as they will be based on facts rather than feelings.

So as we turn our attention to prevention and cure we note that men account for 78% of all the persons killed in traffic crashes. If this fact were better known then perhaps we would get the men to lead the road safety push. We seem to be killing of ourselves, and we can't blame the women for this they are far safer and courteous drivers, that is why one of our member companies, ICWI call them road angels. Maybe we could solve the road safety problem by banning men from driving, think about that one. That would be an evidence based decision. More seriously we are concerned that pedestrians account for 34 % of road users killed in car crashes, so the behaviour change is not just about the motorists. Many of us have observed so many persons engrossed in a cell phone conversation or texting while walking and stepping into the path of moving vehicles. I have observed that our youngsters are the main culprits with this dangerous practice. Of course most Jamaicans believe they are good at multitasking so we routinely

use our cell phones when we drive. Some experts argue that distractions while driving can be deadly and some equate using a cell phone while driving with driving under the influence of alcohol.

We are almost at the half way mark in 2013 and the figures indicate that if we continue at the current rate we will see a 9% jump in fatalities in 2013. We must resolve today to change that. The Insurance industry has always played its part in that process.

Over the years we have been hard at work on the prevention side, working with our partners in road safety to limit crashes. We have over the years done projects with our partners such as Mr Grennell who must be commended for making road safety his life mission and approaching this vital work with such passion. We also have been involved with initiatives with the Road Safety Council, the Road Safety Unit of the Ministry of Works, along with all Government Agencies involved with Motoring in addition to the Jamaica Automobile Association with whom we have partnered over the last two years to improve driver education and car maintenance techniques.

We recognise that Public Education and the use of safety gear are critical in changing driver behaviour and we will continue to support those efforts. We were involved in seat belt campaign a few years back which was quite effective.

Today our presence is an indication of our commitment to Road safety and an endorsement of Grennell's efforts to curb mayhem on our roads. We want to commit more drivers to learn defensive driving techniques as it will help to save lives. I commend it particularly to motor vehicle fleet owners especially those in the public transport system, I also recommend it to parents as they send their children on the road to be motorists that ought to be a must. More and more of our member companies are looking more favourably at drivers who have done such a programme.

More recently we have put a lot of road safety material on our website as we target particularly schools equipped as many of them are today

with computer labs and tablets. You can log on to “iaj-online.com” and use the material posted there to conduct road safety classes and build awareness and learn the consequences of the improper use of our roads. Those who visit our booth here at the expo will see that this is our focus today but we have provided it 24/ 7, in cyberspace use it wisely. Also have available on our website, the synopsis of a seminal study done by Dr Paris Lyew – Ayee Jr, Director of the Mona Informatics School at UWI Mona, which maps crashes in Jamaica between 2000 and 2010.

The study identifies the areas of Jamaica where crashes are more likely to happen. This project was partially financed by one of our member companies JNGI who have used the information to put road signs at these crash hot spots around the island so that motorists can take greater care when driving in those areas. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Enforcement is major part of road safety and I must commend the Polices Road Traffic Team under the enthusiastic action oriented leadership of Superintendent Lewis for the great job they are doing, even though he bashes us some times, indeed they have made a difference to traffic management. I want to also salute the work being done by the Road Safety Unit of the Ministry of Transport and works and the Island Traffic Authority with whom we also work with who are bringing more technology into assisting the road safety efforts particularly with the thrust in Accident Reconstruction.

This is another area in which the Insurance Industry is lending a hand so we will be able to better understand our Road safety issues so we can attack it clinically and scientifically. We also laud the efforts of the Ministry Of Transport and Works who along with the Road Safety Council have been working hard at changing the antiquated, out of date Road Traffic Act which they have promised us this year. This will provide more sanctions to be used against those persons who use the road indiscriminately.

Finally we have been working quietly with a number of Government Agencies to filter out certain persons who work in the shadows from being allowed the privilege of driving on our roads such as holders of bogus drivers licenses some of whom are unable to read either road code let alone road signs and pose a clear and present danger to all users of the road. We are in dialogue with the authorities and hope to utilise traffic violations in our underwriting process as it is clear that some persons should be removed from driving motor vehicles, so if you elude the law we may catch you at the insurance company, as many times the law is slow to catch up.

As I close I want to stress once more that Road safety is everybody's business and the boring phrase, that the life you save may be your own is as true as book as your grandmother would tell you. As an industry, we will continue play our part, what is yours, find it and act now, delay is not just danger it is many times death or disability. Once more thanks Mr Grennell for inviting me to speak at this important function and the insurance industry joins with all Jamaica to support you as you continue to work tirelessly, and selflessly as a crusader for road safety.

Insurance Association of Jamaica