

International Workshop: "Reducing Accident Injuries through Seat Belts and Helmets"

January 8, 2005

In India, 2-wheelers constitute almost 70 per cent of the motorized vehicles on roads it is estimated that about 25,000 two-wheeler riders die in road accidents every year and a majority of these victims could have been saved by effective use of protective headgears. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India has been directing the State Governments to effectively enforce the Section 129 of the Motor Vehicles Act but the implementation has not been satisfactory. There is, therefore, a need to promote awareness of this problem among the State Governments and help them, in turn to catalyze the same amongst the road users.

Similar is the case of the usage of seat belts in four wheeled vehicles on the Indian roads. In the developed world, where seat belts fixation laws, promotion and usage have been a priority, it is conservatively estimated that over the last 25 years about 3,10,000 fatalities and 9 million critical injuries have been prevented through wearing of seat belts. In the wake of a vacuum in scientific collision investigation and research in India, the number and percentage of deaths and serious injuries to vehicle occupants not wearing seat belts is not available. However, this number must be large enough to be alarming. In India, Rule 125 of the Central Motor Vehicle Rules prescribes mandatory fitment and use of the seat belts. Strict enforcement of the same, however, is yet to be achieved.

The FIA Foundation United Kingdom, in association with the Transport Research Laboratory, UK and the Global Road Safety Partnership, has developed a "Seat Belt Campaign Tool Kit. This tool kit brings forth the arguments and facts on fitting and wearing of seat belts. It advises on raising compliance by a range of techniques including enforcement, publicity, education and incentive schemes. Though Seat Belts and Helmet Under the request of IRTE & World Road Safety Network (WRSN) FIA Foundation has launched this toolkit during this event.

The one-day workshop, held on 8th January, 2005, was organised by the Institute of Road Traffic Education in partnership with the Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport, and Highways, Government of India, and the FA Foundation and in collaboration with the Delhi Police, Haryana Highway Patrol RoSPA and

WRSN. The Workshop was attended by over 75 participants and was supported and presented by Castrol India Ltd.

Divided in four main sessions, the Workshop was inaugurated by Mr. David Ward, Director General, FIA Foundation. The Automotive Research Association of India, Pune, and Bureau of India Standards (BIS) made presentations of standards and use of Seat belts and Helmets. Goa Medical College demonstrated how forensic studies have revealed that not wearing helmets was the principal cause of fatalities and serious injuries amongst two-wheeler riders. Police presentations brought to light the practical difficulties the department faces in enforcing helmets and seat belt laws

Recommendations

To enable promotion of proper usage of helmets and seat belts, following important recommendations were made

1. There is a need to muster political will for implementation of helmet and seat belt laws
 2. Research to be undertaken to enable manufacturing of user friendly helmets for different categories of road users as well as for hot and humid climates.
 3. Helmets and seat belts must be enforced across the country as prescribed by Indian Traffic Legislation and politicians must refrain from indulgence in relaxation of the same.
 - 4 Adequate and directed publicity must be made on TV channels by the National and State Governments to promote the use of safety belts and helmets
 5. Scientific accident investigation must be carried out for all serious fatal accidents so that true data is generated to understand the extent of causes and consequences of collisions related to non-adherence of helmet and seat belt wearing
 6. Two wheeler manufacturers must make it their duty to promote/provide/include in their costs and sale the provision of helmets
 7. Insurance companies must play a practical role in promoting road safety measures
- & Non-government participation to be actively sought for as it is crucial in promoting usage of safety belts and helmets.