



Northern
Territory
Government

NT Road Safety Taskforce Report 2006

KEY FINDINGS

SAFER ROAD USE: A Territory Imperative

**ONE PERSON IS KILLED AND
NINE SERIOUSLY INJURED ON
TERRITORY ROADS EVERY WEEK**

A SAFER TERRITORY IS IN YOUR HANDS

The findings contained in this document have been taken from the Northern Territory Road Safety Taskforce Report 2006 – *SAFER ROAD USE: A Territory Imperative*.

A copy of the full report is available at www.saferroaduse.nt.gov.au.
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DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

YOUR RISK | Territorians are at great risk from other drivers who are under the influence of alcohol – at least 48% of fatal crashes in the NT are alcohol-related.

The NT Report established that half of the fatal crashes in the Northern Territory are alcohol-related. From December 2005 to January 2006 statistics from Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria, on the number of drivers caught with alcohol readings above the legal limit, revealed the following:

Place	Drivers who tested over the legal alcohol limit
Northern Territory	1 driver in every 42 over the limit
Queensland	1 driver in every 192 over the limit
Victoria	1 driver in every 314 over the limit

(NT Report, page 16)

This means that every safe NT driver is eight times more likely than a driver in Victoria to share the road with another driver who is over the legal alcohol limit. This is related to the level of alcohol consumption – the NT has the highest annual per capita consumption of any state or territory (13.8 litres of alcohol per adult, compared with Victoria at 7.8 litres per adult).

The consequences are in the carnage on Territory roads. At least 48% of fatal crashes and 17% of serious injuries in the NT are alcohol-related. This compares with 28% of fatalities in Victoria and Queensland.

DRINK-DRIVER REPEAT OFFENDERS

YOUR RISK | Territorians are at great risk from repeat drink-driving offenders – 28% of all drink-drivers are repeat offenders.

In the Northern Territory, a driver can be apprehended for driving with up to 0.08 blood alcohol concentration (BAC) an unlimited number of times and not lose his or her licence. In addition, the fines for drink-driving are very low.

The NT Report states that the drink-driving statistics for the NT are under-reported. The NT's remoteness and limitations on access to testing drivers means there is no BAC information available for a large proportion of fatal crashes (*NT Report, pages 8 and 16*).

PENALTIES FOR DRINK-DRIVERS

YOUR RISK | With the lowest fines in the country, no demerit points and no disqualification to deter lower level drink-driving, you are at risk on NT roads.

The current NT penalty system for drink-drivers is not an effective deterrent:

- Fines for 0.05-0.08 blood alcohol level drink-driving offences are low. The infringement penalty of \$100 is the country's lowest.
- The NT is the only place where repeat offenders for 0.05-0.08 alcohol offences are not automatically disqualified from driving.
- In addition to the low level of fines and lack of licence loss for repeat offenders, there is no demerit points penalty (*NT Report, page 17*).

Research shows that driver behaviour is influenced by the risk of being caught (drink-driving), and significant penalties (*NT Report, page 57*). A dedicated and highly visible Traffic Section and Highway Patrol would provide greater policing of drink-driving across the NT, both in detection and as a deterrent.

What should change

The NT Report says that the penalties must increase to deter drink-drivers.

- Penalties for exceeding zero (eg taxi drivers) or 0.05 BAC should be increased from \$100 to \$200.
- The driver's licence should be immediately suspended for three months for a second exceed zero or 0.05 BAC offence and six months for any subsequent offence within three years.
- As recommended in the 2003 O'Sullivan Report, *An Assessment of Resource Requirements of the Northern Territory Police Force*, dedicated Traffic Sections should be implemented as soon as possible in 2006-07.
- Create a community information campaign on changes to drink-driving laws.

BREATH AND BLOOD SAMPLES FROM DRINK-DRIVERS

YOUR RISK | Current limitations on taking breath and blood samples mean that drink-drivers can avoid being caught in the NT.

There are limitations on taking breath and blood samples in the NT. Unless hospitalised, breath or blood tests must take place within two hours of an incident. This is complicated by the remoteness of many Territory towns and the NT Police's priority of ensuring people involved in crashes receive medical treatment if needed.

What should change

- Increasing the time limit for taking breath or blood tests from two to four hours and authorising a wider group of medical professionals (registered nurses or qualified people) to take blood samples in places other than hospitals, will help overcome issues with timeliness of testing in remote areas (*NT Report, pages 18 - 19*).

DRINK-DRIVER EDUCATION

The Drink Driver Education (DDE) course offered throughout the NT is aimed at reducing the number of drink-drivers who re-offend. Attendance at an alcohol awareness course is a requirement of licence renewal for those who have lost their licence for drink-driving.

A review of the DDE course by Amity Community Services found that 12.8% of drink-drivers reoffend within three years of completing the course (*NT Report, page 20*).

What should change

- The NT Report recommends a further review of the effectiveness of the current mandatory Drink Driver Education course, reporting back to Cabinet by August 2007.

DRUG-DRIVING

YOUR RISK | The NT has Australia's highest level of certain drug use but police have no powers to test drivers for drugs. Almost one-in-three people detained for driving offences tested positive to drugs.

A number of drugs have the potential to increase the risk of road crashes. They include cannabis, benzodiazepines, amphetamines and opiates.

Drug-driving data, gathered during a pilot study as part of the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) project, indicated that in the NT almost one-in-three people detained for driving offences tested positive to illicit drugs.

The NT is one of only two states or territories without legislation allowing blood and/or urine testing for drugs. Several states and territories have random roadside testing legislation in place or are developing it. Blood samples cannot be tested for drugs other than alcohol in the NT (*NT Report, pages 21 - 23*).

What should change

- Amend the *Traffic Act* to provide the necessary power to collect samples of blood to test for drugs:
 - from people involved in motor vehicle crashes
 - in the case of dangerous or unexplained driver behaviour.
- Create a new offence in the *Traffic Act* for driving having consumed a prohibited drug.
- Create a community information campaign on changes to drug-driving laws (*NT Report, page 24*).

SPEED AND SPEEDING

YOUR RISK | Speed kills. A small reduction in speed can significantly reduce the risk of a crash and the severity of your injuries from that crash.

Reducing speed is fundamental to safer road use. The NT Report quotes many studies from *Road Safety in Australia*, Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) 2004.

The ATSB research shows that a small reduction in speed has a major impact on the occurrence of crashes and the severity of injuries. Driving 10km/h faster can make the difference between a near-miss and a fatal crash. An increase in average vehicle speed from 100km/h to 110km/h can be expected to increase serious injury crashes by about 33% and fatal crashes by about 46% (*NT Report, page 25*).

Three examples from the NT Report highlight the facts:

Example 1 NT: The impact of introducing a speed limit on the Lasseter Highway

The Lasseter Highway, from the Stuart Highway to Yulara, now poses much less risk to Territorians since a 110km/h speed limit was introduced in December 2001. In summary:

Impact of reduced speed limit	% reduction
Reduction in deaths	37%
Reduction in serious injuries	44%
Reduction in total crashes	33%
Reduction in all injuries	40%
Reduction in overturned vehicles	38%
Reduction in run-off-road	27%

(*NT Report, pages 26 - 27*)

Example 2 Victoria: Speed limits on Melbourne's rural and outer freeway network – a two-year case study

Year	Speed limit	Injury crash rate/km travelled
1987	Increased from 100 km/h to 110 km/h	Crash rate increased by 24.6%
1989	Speed limit decreased back to 100 km/h	Crash rate decreased by 19.3%

(*NT Report, page 26*)

Example 3 South Australia: Rural arterial roads and national highways

In 2003, South Australia reduced the speed limit from 110km/h to 100km/h on 1100kms of rural arterial roads and national highways. The recently published report shows that reducing the speed limit by 9% resulted in a 19.7% annual reduction in casualty crashes on these sections of the road (*NT Report, page 26*).

SPEED LIMITS – INFRINGEMENT DETECTION AND PENALTIES

YOUR RISK | You are at high risk from speeding drivers in the NT – where the chance of being caught and the level of penalties are lower than the rest of the country.

Although some may see speed cameras as a means of revenue-raising, there is strong evidence that they reduce average traffic speeds, crashes and crash injuries.

Northern Territory statistics for October 2005 show 178 speeding fines were issued in a three-day period, with 40% of those exceeding the speed limit by 15 km/h or more (*NT Report, page 24*).

High profile and high visibility policing and well-publicised campaigns, as well as the use of marked patrol cars and speed camera vans, deter speeding and improve safety of other drivers (*NT Report, pages 28 - 29 and 60*).

What should change

- Penalties for speeding should be increased.
- Dedicated Highway and Remote Area Traffic Patrols should be established, with high profile colour and badging on units operating out of Katherine and Alice Springs. Speeding in urban areas should be addressed with the formation of dedicated Traffic Sections in Alice Springs and Darwin.

REPEAT OFFENDERS AND SPEED

YOUR RISK | Too many drivers offend repeatedly. The current penalties are not a deterrent, with 34% of offenders receiving two or more speeding fines.

The NT Report describes the rate of repeat speeding offences in the NT as alarming. Of the 44 276 individuals who were issued with 74 531 speeding fines between 2003 and 2005:

- 8165 were issued with two speeding fines
- 3418 were issued with three speeding fines
- 3227 were issued with between 4 and 10 speeding fines.

A staggering 134 people were issued with 11 or more speeding fines, with the worst speeding offender receiving 47 fines in the three-year period (*NT Report, page 50*).

There is currently no effective system to deter people from re-offending. Research has shown that fines alone, while important, are not an effective means of preventing repeat offenders from driving dangerously.

Penalty levels, demerit points and education about excessive speed

Most demerit points accumulated by Australian drivers are for speeding offences. Speed affects both the risk of crashing and the crash severity (*NT Report, page 52*).

Most states introduced demerit points by 1969, with the ACT following in 1993. Such systems do not raise revenue and apply equally to all. Where demerit points systems are in place, the rate of offending slows as demerit points are accumulated. The following table compares penalties for speeding across Australia:

State/ territory	Exceeding speed limit by up to 15km/h		Exceeding speed limit by 16-30km/h		Exceeding speed limit by 31-44km/h		Exceeding speed limit over 45km/h	
	Fine \$	Points	Fine \$	Points	Fine \$	Points	Fine \$	Points
NT	50	n/a	100	n/a	150	n/a	n/a	n/a
NSW	75	2	225	5	575	9	1550	14
SA	163	1	259	3	350	4	350	6
ACT	130	1	208	3	579	4	1597	6
Vic	210	3	278	4	377	6	451	8
Qld	100	1	250	4	350	6	700	6
WA	100	1	150	3	250	4	350	6
Tas	80	1	110	3	190	4	400	6

(*NT Report, page 29*)

In one study, three out of four people agreed that the possibility of losing demerit points would influence their driving speed. A potential loss of licence is more likely to contribute to a safer driving culture and more effective enforcement by police officers (*NT Report, page 52*).

What should change

- The NT Report recommends a demerit points system to target repeat offenders. In addition, ongoing road safety education and awareness programs will assist in changing the undesirable attitudes of repeat offenders towards road use.

ATTITUDES TO OPEN ROAD SPEED LIMITS

YOUR RISK

Our road safety culture does not see speed on the open road as an issue. This means that no matter how safely you drive, you are at risk from other motorists travelling at high speed.

Contrary to some beliefs, driving on the open road is not safer at higher speeds. The NT Report highlights ATSB findings that this is not the case – higher speeds result in higher rates of fatalities and crashes causing injuries.

More than half of all fatal crashes in the NT are run-off-road or overturned crashes that imply loss of control and excessive speed.

The NT Report says that changing our road safety culture about speed on the open road will be important in improving the road safety record in the NT, as 38% of speed-related fatalities occurred on open roads (*NT Report, pages 27 and 85*).

Speed is under-represented as a factor in road deaths and injuries due in part to no open road speed limits. The creation of a Highway Patrol will also assist with policing heavy transport vehicles on issues of speed, fatigue management and load restraint (*NT Report, page 59*).

What should change

- A speed limit on open roads should be introduced and penalties for speeding should be increased. There should be education and media campaigns on speed limits and the safety benefits of reducing speed. The NT Report proposes a default speed limit of 110km/h on open roads.
- Additional advisory signs to raise driver awareness of the speed limit should be placed on roads leading out of major population centres and border crossings.

FATIGUE

YOUR RISK | Driver fatigue is a sleeping killer. The risk of crashing when driving after being awake for 17 hours is equivalent to having a blood alcohol reading of 0.05.

Fatigue is a contributor to road crashes in the Northern Territory, but its true extent is not known. However, the NT Report concludes that with travel involving long distances in remote country, it is likely fatigue, regardless of average speed, plays a significant part in NT crashes.

The majority of crashes on NT open roads are single vehicle crashes (run-off-road, overturned), which suggests a lethal link between fatigue and speed.

Since 2000, fatigue has been recorded as a cause in 6% of deaths from road crashes and in 4% of serious injuries in the NT. However, because it is difficult to identify the exact cause in some fatal crashes, it is strongly believed the role of fatigue is under-recorded (*NT Report, page 31*).

A study by the Centre for Sleep Research in South Australia found that people who drive after being awake for 17 hours have a risk of crashing equivalent to a blood alcohol reading of 0.05. After being awake for 24 hours, the risk rises to be equivalent to 0.10 blood alcohol level (*NT Report, page 31*).

The ATSB estimates that fatigue may be a factor in up to 30% of fatal crashes and 15% of serious injuries (ATSB 2004). Statistics from the WA Office of Road Safety (*2004 Fatigue Campaign, Fact Sheet*) indicate that around 30% of rural crashes were attributable to fatigue.

In addition to the 89 commercial and public roadside rest areas, the NT currently provides resources and programs to raise awareness of the dangers of fatigue and to encourage drivers to take appropriate rest (*NT Report, page 31*).

What should change

- The current level of fatigue education and awareness campaigns should continue, and should include information on the rest areas available in the NT (*NT Report, page 32*).

SEATBELTS

YOUR RISK

Not wearing a seatbelt increases your risk of being killed or seriously injured. In more than 50% of fatal crashes in the NT since 2000, seatbelts were not worn when available.

Not wearing a seatbelt increases the chance of severe injury or death. Since 2000 on NT roads:

- 112 vehicle occupants who were not wearing seatbelts have died (51% of fatalities where a seatbelt was available).
- 276 were seriously injured (13% of serious injuries where a seatbelt was available).

The US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that seatbelts reduce the risk of death for front seat car occupants by approximately 50% (*NT Report, page 33*).

The NT Report found that the NT is the only state or territory where the *Traffic Regulations* permit children under 12 months to travel in vehicles without restraints.

The seriousness of this road safety issue means an urgent response is needed to change the culture of seatbelt use in the NT.

What should change

- The NT Report recommends creating a package of education and media campaigns, complemented by increased penalty and enforcement efforts. There should also be a high profile enforcement campaign at the time the new penalty begins (*NT Report, page 36*).
- The issue of carrying passengers, including children under 12 months, without seatbelts or restraints should be included in amendments to the NT *Traffic Regulations*.

RUNNING RED LIGHTS

YOUR RISK

At traffic lights you are at risk from drivers who run red lights. Since 2000 there have been 193 crashes attributed to drivers disobeying traffic lights in Darwin alone.

Red light running is high-risk behaviour. Those involved in the resulting side-impact crashes are likely to be seriously injured or killed. In most instances, drivers who run red lights are also speeding – further increasing the risk. In a 24-hour period in November 2005, road sensors indicated that at 11 Darwin intersections, as many as 2613 vehicles were potential red light runners (*NT Report, page 54*).

Since 2000 there have been 193 crashes in Darwin where NT Police concluded the vehicle disobeyed traffic lights. These crashes resulted in four fatalities, 58 serious injuries, 45 people treated at hospital but not admitted, and 15 injured but not seeking treatment.

Current penalties in the NT are low in comparison to the rest of Australia and therefore less of a deterrent. Nationally, running a red light is in the highest category of demerit point penalties (*NT Report, page 95*).

State/territory	Failure to obey red traffic light		Failure to obey yellow traffic light	
	Fine \$	Points	Fine \$	Points
NT	120	n/a	80	n/a
NSW	300	3	300	3
SA	275	3	275	3
ACT	233	3	233	3
Vic	210	3	210	3
Qld	135	3	135	3
WA	120	3	80	3
Tas	110	3	80	3

(*NT Report, table 4: page 55*)

What should change

- Combined red light and speed cameras, which are widely used in the rest of Australia, should be installed at priority intersections in Darwin. The penalties for failing to obey red and yellow lights should be doubled.

GROUPS AT HIGHER RISK OF DEATH OR INJURY

YOUR RISK

If you are a young or new driver, a visitor or an Indigenous Territorian, you are at higher risk of being involved in a road crash and road fatality than other drivers. Young NT drivers have three times the rate of crashes and fatalities of other drivers.

The NT Report has identified three groups that are at particular risk:

- New and young drivers.
- Visitors – including temporary residents, recent arrivals to the NT and those with a driver's licence from another state or overseas.
- Indigenous people.

The report notes that in the statistics for remote and rural areas, the latter two groups are at a higher risk.

NEW AND YOUNG DRIVERS

The table below shows that new, inexperienced and young NT drivers have approximately three times the rates of road crashes and fatalities of older drivers.

Driver age group	% of all drivers	% of drivers in all crashes	% of drivers in fatalities
16-20 years	6.3%	18%	18.7%
21-25 years	10.8%	14.5%	17.6%

(NT Report, page 43)

There is an elevated risk for night-time driving and driving with other young people. Drivers aged 16-19 in the NT comprised 5% of all drivers but were involved in 24% of all crashes after 10.00pm at night. In 15.6% of crashes involving 16-year-old drivers, there were three or more passengers in the car – compared with 3.8% for drivers of all ages *(NT Report, page 43)*.

These statistics are consistent with national and international results *(NT Report, page 43)*.

Driver education

Traditional driver education teaches basic vehicle control and road skills. Recent research shows that we may also need to focus on skills such as hazard perception and hazard-modifying behaviour.

The evidence shows that driver training on its own does not lead to young drivers having fewer crashes. The amount of additional supervised driving by learners is vital in reducing crash rates. So too are zero blood alcohol limits, limiting driving at night and restricting the number of young passengers for P-platers *(NT Report, page 44)*.

A step-by-step approach to gaining a licence (GDL – the Graduated Driver Licensing system)

The evidence is that taking a stepped approach has greatly reduced crash and injury rates in many developed countries:

- Step 1: New drivers start with a minimum supervised learner period.
- Step 2: Followed by a provisional driving period where they gain experience under reduced risk conditions.
- Step 3: After gaining maturity and experience behind the wheel, they graduate to a full licence.

In New Zealand, injury and fatality rates of 15 to 24-year-old vehicle occupants have been halved since the introduction of GDL. There has also been significant success with GDL systems in the USA.

The NT's licensing system permits unrestricted driving at the youngest age among all Australian states and territories. The Territory has the least-restrictive system (*NT Report, page 46*).

Should we achieve the same results as New Zealand, it is estimated that crashes in this age group would reduce by 180 and fatalities by four to five each year.

What should change

- A GDL stepped licence system should be introduced in two phases to allow time to raise public awareness and to take into account the special needs of remote communities.

Phase one would include:

- A minimum 12-month learner period for all drivers and motorcycle riders under 25
- No mobile phone use during learner and provisional periods
- Double the penalty for driving without L or P plate to \$100.

Phase two could include:

- Minimum supervised driving hours during learner phase
- Limits on night driving and the number of young passengers.

(*NT Report, page 49*)

VISITORS

In the NT Report, visitors include international and interstate tourists, such as business visitors, those visiting family and those who live in the NT but have a licence from elsewhere.

Visitors accounted for 20% of fatalities and 19% of serious injuries in the NT from 2000 to 2005. The most frequent crash type was single vehicle crashes in rural areas. Interstate and international visitors were equally represented in the driver fatalities (*NT Report, pages 10 and 41 - 42*).

What should change

- Building on existing information programs, signage and/or road surface marking should be installed on routes with high international visitor traffic. This should help reduce disorientation

(*NT Report, page 42*).

INDIGENOUS RESIDENTS

In the NT in recent years, Indigenous Territorians have made up 50% of road deaths.

However, statistics for Indigenous Territorians were not as high for serious injuries from road crashes. Of a total of 2995 fatalities and serious injuries in the NT in the period 2000 to 2005, a total of 779, or 26%, involved Indigenous Territorians. This is less than the representation of Indigenous people in the total NT population (*NT Report, page 37*).

Environmental and socio-economic factors that contribute to Indigenous Territorian crash statistics include:

- 75% of Indigenous Territorians live in remote communities, travelling long distances, often on open roads of poorer quality.
- Rates of vehicle ownership are lower, leading to overcrowding and less seatbelt use.
- Access to public transport is very limited.
- Access to appropriate driver training and supervision is limited.
- Remoteness of communities means that in the event of a crash, medical treatment may be delayed.

The table below shows that Indigenous fatalities are higher in every state and territory than non-Indigenous fatalities. They are the highest in the NT, SA and WA.

The table also shows that non-Indigenous Territorians are more than twice as likely to be killed on Territory roads than anywhere else in Australia. Road safety is clearly a problem for **all** Territorians.

Average annual road fatalities per 100 000 population for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by State/Territory, 1999-2002



(*NT Report, page 37*)

Pedestrians

The ATSB report also identified that pedestrians comprised a much larger proportion of Indigenous road fatalities than of non-Indigenous fatalities, particularly in the NT, WA and Qld. Alcohol intoxication was accentuated among Indigenous pedestrian fatalities.

NT crash statistics show that between 2000 and 2005 there were 56 pedestrian fatalities (18.7% of all fatalities) – of which 51 (or 92%) were Indigenous people (*NT Report, page 8*).

The higher risk for Indigenous people in pedestrian fatalities could be addressed through education programs.

What should change

- Road safety education programs need community backing. A pilot program of four community-based road safety officer positions should be created – two in remote communities in the Top End and two in remote communities in Central Australia.

The officers would:

- work with communities and community councils to make road safety a priority
- help with community programs and campaigns
- help develop community-based road safety education and awareness
- provide an additional resource for learner driver supervision and the coordination of driver training courses.

(*NT Report, pages 39 - 40*)

- Remote Area Traffic Patrols should be established in Katherine and Alice Springs to increase remote area enforcement (*NT Report, pages 60 - 61*).

FUTURE COORDINATION OF ROAD SAFETY IN THE NT

Future coordination of the road safety effort, along with the measures outlined in the NT Report, is crucial to reducing the Territory's road toll. The NT Report recommends that Local Government becomes more involved in local road safety. This will allow greater community voice in road safety issues.

The NT Report also recommends that coordination at a Territory-wide level should be undertaken by a senior level group comprising key Government agencies, TIO, AANT, and an acknowledged road safety expert.

What should change

- Amend the *Local Government Act* to include road safety as a role for Local Government (*NT Report, pages 67 - 68*).
- Replace the Road Safety Council with the Road Safety Coordination Group (*NT Report, page 68 - 74*).

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NT ROAD SAFETY TASKFORCE

The NT Road Safety Taskforce recommends a range of measures to improve road safety in the Northern Territory. In summary, they are:

Changes to penalties	Reference
Increase penalties for - alcohol-related offences - speeding - not wearing seatbelts - running red lights	Recs 1, 7, 8, 14
Introduce immediate suspension of driver licences for repeat drink-driving offenders	Rec 1
Introduce tighter seatbelt regulations	Rec 9
Introduce a demerit point system based on the national model	Rec 13
Changes to enforcement	
Improve detection of drink and drug-driving	Rec 2, 4
Introduce default speed limit on open roads to 110km/h	Rec 6
Develop a Graduated Driver Licensing scheme for young drivers	Rec 12
Install integrated red light and speed cameras	Rec 14
Highway Patrol and Remote Area Traffic Patrol units to operate out of Katherine and Alice Springs	Rec 16, 17
Establish a dedicated Traffic Section in NT Police	Rec 15
Improved road safety education and signage	
Better road safety education curriculum for students	Rec 19
Review current mandatory Drink Driver Education course	Rec 3
Communicate new drink and drug-driving initiatives to the public	Rec 5
Introduce community-based officers for outreach into remote communities	Rec 10
Better signage and marking on routes with high tourist traffic	Rec 11
Increased funding for road safety education	Rec 6, 8, 18
Improved coordination of road safety	
Improve coordination on road safety between all authorities	Rec 20, 21

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