

Speech: Address to the National Roads Policing Conference

Introduction

Good morning.

I'm really pleased to join you for this year's National Roads Policing Conference.

Last night I was at a road safety event in the House of Commons meeting some of those who have lost friends or relatives in collisions on the road.

I also frequently meet bereaved families in my office in the Department for Transport.

These meetings are never easy.

Yet as I listen to people's stories, I am filled with respect for the job that you do.

Often, you're the first on the scene.

Often, too, you're the first to break the news of tragedy.

Few can understand how tough that job must be.

Yet all of us must be grateful that you are there to do it.

With courage and professionalism.

So I would like to start by saying: thank you.

Thank you for being there in the aftermath of tragedy, and for supporting those tragedy touches.

Of course, dealing with the aftermath of tragedy is only one part of your job.

The priority is always to prevent it from happening in the first place.

And that's why I was so pleased to see this year's conference theme: enforcement.

And you're covering a lot of ground today and tomorrow.

From older drivers, to emergency pursuits.

In my speech I'd like to focus on three specific areas of enforcement.

Drink.

Drugs.

And mobile phones.

Drink

First, drink driving.

It's amazing how far we've come on drink driving.

50 years ago, it was tolerated, if not something anyone would be proud of.

Today, most people agree that it's completely unacceptable.

So it's no coincidence that, during these last 50 years, deaths caused by drink driving have been cut by over 80%.

80%.

But not 100%.

Yes, with the drastic fall in drink-related deaths over the last 50 years, it becomes more difficult to maintain the same rate of progress.

But there is still more we can do before we get that number down further.

That's why, since 2015, in order for high-risk offenders to get their licenses back they've had to prove they're not alcohol dependant.

Another frustration that you've told us about is drivers who fail a breathalyser test and then demand a blood test – in the hope that they'll sober up in the meantime.

So we removed their automatic right to do so.

Making enforcement easier.

Of course, none of this is a substitute for people taking responsibility for their actions and their consequences. That's why our message during Christmas was that a second drink can double the chance of a collision. Our message was complemented by police force's own initiatives.

For example, Essex Police's campaign focused on how it feels to live with the consequences of drink driving. And local forces carried out spot checks, deterring and catching drivers who were a danger to the public.

Drugs

In 2015 we passed [Section 5a of the Road Traffic Act](#).

This put drug driving on the same legal footing as drink driving.

And we brought in set limits for 8 drugs, legal and illegal.

And I am pleased to be able to give you the interim results for 2016.

To put it in context, in 2014 there were 879 endorsements for drug driving.

In 2016 – the first full year with the new law – there were 8,500.

That's 8,500 people you have caught and successfully convicted of drug driving.

8,500 dangerous drivers taken off our roads.

And, actually, the final total will be even higher, because the last 6 weeks of data aren't yet included in the figures.

But that is approximately 10 times as many drug users who lost their licences in 2016 compared to 2014.

People who were a danger to the public, banned from our roads.

No doubt, lives saved.

That's a fantastic result.

And it's thanks to the efforts of road police officers up and down the country getting out and enforcing the law of the land.

To support your work, we've also provided £1 million to police forces across England and Wales.

That money has trained a thousand officers in gathering evidence of impairment caused by drugs. It's also paid for roadside swabbing equipment, so when you pull over a suspected drug user you can test them for cannabis and cocaine immediately.

So our message to motorists is clear.

Drive under the influence of drugs and there's a very good chance you will get caught.

Mobile phones

But I also have another message for those minority of motorists with a scant regard for the law of the land. It's about mobile phones.

Most of you would never think of using your mobile whilst driving.

Talking. texting. checking updates.

You know that it's a serious crime which destroys lives.

But for those motorists who don't understand this, we're increasing the penalties.

From March (2017), it'll cost 6 points on your licence.

And the fixed penalty fine – doubled.

So our message to anyone thinking about using their mobile whilst driving is simple.

Don't do it.

It's a message that we'll be reinforcing with a hard-hitting THINK campaign.

Earlier I mentioned the connection between social attitudes and the drink drive casualty rate.

Put simply, an increased stigma means fewer deaths.

So I want every motorist to understand that using your mobile behind the wheel is as socially unacceptable as drink driving.

Or drug driving, for that matter.

That's why we will not only penalise such drivers, but we will also educate them about the consequences of their actions.

We want to work with police forces and with road safety groups to develop a practical model for education.

We're determined to get this model right, including changing legislation if needed.

Our role, as the government, is to support enforcement and the work that you do.

So that we can continue to make progress on safer roads.

Conclusion

But while legislation and statistics are crucial, the words can sometimes sound rather dry.

You know better than anyone that every statistic represents a lost life and a devastated family.

It's brought home to me every time I hold one of those meetings, or whenever I speak to a road police officer.

Yet I also never forget that due to your actions, there are many people who have been saved from such tragedies.

Each day and night of the year – whatever the weather – there are people who get to go home to their loved ones because the police are out on our roads.

Enforcing the law.

Protecting us from harm.

So thank you, once again, for the work that you do.

On behalf of the public, Parliament, and the government – thank you.