

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

media service

From Paula Miles, Exeter 383262, January 04,2001

DRIVERS URGED TO TAKE ACTION OVER ROAD DEATHS IN DEVON

DEVON County Council is urging drivers and motorcyclists to make their New Year's resolution one to improve their attitudes on the road, particularly to speed, or Devon will lose the benefit of being one of the safest places to travel in the country.

This stark warning comes as figures for 2000 show that road deaths in the county were 32 per cent higher than in 1999, with 50 deaths on the roads - the highest since 1991.

Of those 50 deaths, 29 involved car occupants, 12 motorcyclists, five pedestrians and four cyclists. Of all the deaths, 16 occurred on trunk roads or the motorway, which the Highways Agency has responsibility for.

Initial investigations of the fatal crashes would suggest that many have involved drivers, particularly motorcyclists, travelling too fast for the conditions. Road safety professionals also highlight a number of other driving characteristics that need tackling in Devon including:

- Close following or 'tailgating', which reduces the margin of error and leads to shunts causing painful neck whiplash injuries
- Mature motorcyclists lacking appropriate skills to cope with powerful machines, leading to very serious injury
- Abuse of speed limits, particularly in urban areas, that threaten the safety and quality of life of residents, children, pedestrians and cyclists. A child hit at 30mph has a 50-50 chance of surviving.

Important road safety legislation is currently being considered by Parliament. In line with its Road Safety Strategy, 'Tomorrow's Roads - Safer for Everyone', the Government is putting forward proposals to stiffen certain sentences and make available more opportunities for police and local authorities to increase detection of speeding by allowing some revenue from fines to finance increased use of cameras.

Councillor Margaret Rogers, Devon County Council's Executive Chairman for Environment commented: "Drivers on Devon's roads need to take responsibility for their actions and ensure that they are driving safely for road conditions and adhere to the speed limit. Winter conditions still seem to catch people out, particularly in the dark and wet.

"The better news is that the overall trend of injuries continues to drop, with the total being nine per cent below the 1999 level. This gives us ground to build on and during 2001 the profile of road safety in the county will be raised as a major objective in the new Devon transportation programme."

Edward Chorlton, County Environment Director said: "The scale of tragedies on Devon's roads is unacceptable and I intend to fully exploit the opportunities open to Devon County Council to improve matters. The Devon Road Safety Plan 2001-2006 sets out an ambitious programme for improving the safety quality of our roads and measures to improve the quality of driving. This will be achieved in partnership, particularly with the police, health authorities and local communities."

Notes for Editors:

Cllr Rogers can be contacted on 01297 680384.

Edward Chorlton can be contacted on 01392 382149.

For further background information please contact Peter Gimber, County Road Safety Officer on 01392 382118.