

70% of drivers admit to speeding

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Most Canadians will freely admit to exceeding the speed limit from time to time, but when it comes to just how fast they drive, they underestimate their true speed and delude themselves into thinking their behaviour really isn't that bad, says a new report by Transport Canada.

Based on a survey of 2,002 drivers conducted in 2005 and 12 focus groups held across the country, the report finds most Canadians consider speeding to be dangerous and believe it leads to an increased risk of collision, injury or death.

However, seven out of 10 Canadians admitted to doing it anyway, while an additional eleven per cent said they speed but only on highways, according to the executive summary of the forthcoming report, a copy of which was obtained by The Canadian Press.

Drivers surveyed admitted to an average speed that was 12 km/h higher than the limit on major highways, 10 km/h higher on two-lane highways or country roads, and seven over on residential streets.

It's fair to assume the real numbers are considerably higher, experts say, because most drivers underestimate the extent of their speeding and consider it to be benign.

Those drivers believe they are technically speeding according to the rule of law, the report concludes, but not in a way that endangers either themselves or others – even though they are quick to condemn other speeders as dangerous.

"People don't see themselves as the problem, they see others as the problem – I'm OK and you're the bad guy," said Raynald Marchand, the general manager of programs for the Canada Safety Council.

"That's pretty human, it's the same with people with regard to cellular phones – I'm OK when I'm using mine but that guy over there, he's the

problem."

The report suggests the biggest problem group of drivers is the 30 per cent who speed more than average, and don't believe their speeding translates into a greater risk of an accident, injury or death.

They're labelled two ways, either as risk-takers or pragmatic speeders. Risk-takers enjoy the thrill of high speed and defying authority, while pragmatic speeders consciously drive aggressively when they believe they have reason to, such as being in a hurry.

The report suggests public education campaigns should focus on this hard-to-reach group because they pose a considerable danger to themselves and others, but seem oblivious to the risks until it's too late.

"People speed and they don't think (an accident) is going to happen to them. And most times, nothing happens, and they build on that thinking that nothing will ever happen," Marchand said.

Even if speeders are in perfect control of their vehicle, their speed will haunt them in the event that another driver gets in their way and causes an accident, he added.

"When you look at collision crashes, speeding itself is often not the actual cause of the collision, however, speeding is always an aggravating factor in the collision – the occupant would've been less injured or would've survived if they had been closer to the speed limit," Marchand said.

"The physics are unforgiving to the speeding driver."

Ontario recently targeted its most aggressive drivers with a new law that imposes tough penalties on anyone caught exceeding the speed limit by 50 km/h. Their licence is immediately suspended for a week, their car is towed and impounded for seven days, and if convicted, they face a fine of between \$2,000 and \$10,000.

After five weeks of what has been dubbed a "shock and awe" campaign, more than 1,300 drivers have been caught, a number that has shocked even police.

But some experts believe the focus should be on reducing the speed of all drivers, even if it's just marginally.

Brian Jonah, the director of road safety programs at Transport Canada, said the chance of an accident resulting in a fatality is reduced by one per cent with every five km/h reduction in speed.

While that may not sound like much, a small slowdown in everyone's speed would translate into many lives saved and reduced injuries in accidents, he said, considering that 2,725 drivers were killed and over 212,000 were injured in 2004, the most recent year that statistics are available.

An appeal is going out to the provinces and territories to draft plans to make the roads safer, and Jonah said he'd be happy if the auto industry also did its part, by changing the way it markets vehicles.

"We're trying to deter manufacturers from using ads for their vehicles that rely on speed and power, those kinds of advertisements could glorify dangerous driving."

The full Transport Canada study is to be publicly released later this week.

The poll that contributed to the report's research was conducted during the months of March and April 2005 by Ekos Research Associates, and is considered accurate within 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.