

# Speed, reckless driving cause death and injury

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- Although Oman's accident ratio is fairly low, accidents tend to be much more severe because of high speeds, AXA Insurance country manager Deepak Kamath, says.
- Image Credit: Sunil K. Vaidya/Gulf News

Muscat: The fatalities on Oman's roads continue to be a worrying factor despite a series of measures taken by relevant authorities.

“Speed and reckless driving cause death and horrific injury almost daily on Oman’s roads and no matter how good a driver, no one is immune to the risk of being hit by another driver,” said Bernadette Bhacker, who runs a campaign to bring down accidents in Oman under the name of Al Mustadaama (sustainability).

“Oman’s road network keeps improving and instead of appreciating the impressive roads people tend to drive faster and faster on that, causing fatal accidents,” Deepak Karnath, Country Manager for AXA Insurance, he said

In 2009, 953 people died on Oman’s roads and half of them were drivers. “Oman many not be very high on accident ratio but due to speed here the severity is much higher, thus the higher fatalities,” Karnath said.

He also pointed out another reason that due to Oman's vast topography people tend to travel long distances more and therefore indulge in higher speed.

In Oman people travel to distant places to their villages from Muscat during weekends and are tempted to drive faster on excellent roads of Oman, therefore causing more severe accidents.

Karnath said that a new law on third party compensation introduced in December last year has had little impact on death rate on the country's roads. "The 'diya' was increased from 5,000 Omani riyals to 15,000 but the number of dead on the roads has not come down drastically," he said.

Some time back the then director-general of Traffic had suggested structured premium for automobile insurance during an interview with Gulf News.

He had said that there should be higher premium for the 'high risk drivers' (like new and young drivers). He believed then that high premium would work as biggest deterrent and bring down traffic violations.

However, no law was introduced but insurance companies on their own charge higher premium to high risk drivers. "There are ways out with people insuring vehicles in the names of older siblings or parents/elders," said an official with an insurance company on condition of anonymity.

The ROP even installed over 200 speed radars to check speeding but drivers continue to speed on Oman's roads.

Now, the authorities have set up special traffic courts to deal with traffic offenders but Bhacker, who also has a website on creating awareness about traffic and driving, is not so optimistic.

"It would take months before these courts are working," she said, adding that the need was to increase awareness among the residents.

### **Grim numbers: Road death toll**

- 336 people died on Oman's roads between January and May 2010.
- 390 fatalities were recorded due to traffic accidents in the first five months of 2009.
- 2.07 million traffic violations took place between 2005 and 2010.
- On an average, about 10,000 motor accidents occur every year in Oman, leaving 680 dead and 7550 injured.