

Road fatalities dropped 3.4pc last year

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DOHA: The number of fatalities due to road traffic accidents in Qatar dropped by 3.4 percent last year compared to the figures of 2008, according to a traffic survey for 2009.

Brigadier Mohammed Saad al Kharji, Director of the Traffic Department said a total of 222 people died in traffic accidents last year against 230 in 2008, even though the number of vehicles on the roads and driving licenses rose during this period.

He said the decline in the number of car accident deaths was a positive indication underlying the success of the traffic law in cutting down traffic accidents.

However, the 222 number of deaths from road traffic accidents in a country with a population of 1.6 million remains extremely high, says Brigadier al Kharji.

According to lawyer Aly Essa al Khulaifi, the slight drop in fatalities in road traffic accidents cannot be attributed to the enforcement of the traffic law as the rate of road traffic accidents leading to fatalities remain very high in Qatar compared to international rates even base on the size of the population.

He believes that tougher punishments may be effective for a variety of premeditated crimes, but not for traffic accidents that sometimes lead to fatalities since such accidents are not premeditated and are mainly the result of a variety of factors such as a mistake or error of judgment made by the driver a third party.

But he concedes that enforcing severe punishments might be effective in curbing certain deliberate traffic violations that may endanger lives, like traffic light violations for example.

Al Khulaifi notes that severe punishments for traffic violations are not enough to cut down traffic accidents, but that parents and schools have an important role to play in raising awareness on the dangers of ignoring traffic rules.

He also called for conducting a study on fatal road traffic accidents and examining each individual case; perhaps other causes for the excess fatalities would be uncovered which would help in making changes to the traffic law so that it is more effective in curbing such accidents.

Engineer Jassim Al Malki agrees, noting that although the penalties for traffic violations have been made more severe the number of traffic accidents in the country has not come down.

He said that 80 percent of national and expatriate drivers abide by the traffic rules, but that the small number of reckless drivers who cause most of traffic accidents do not fear punishments and are not deterred by huge fines, because in the end the parents are the one who foot the bill.