

Speech

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you Alan and Minister Cullen for your very warm welcome. Could I just start by saying that I am here on behalf of my Minister, Jeff Rooker, who sends his apologies that he was unable to make it to the launch because of prior commitments in Parliament today.

I am delighted that once again we in the Department of the Environment have been able to come together with the National Safety Council to develop another road safety campaign that will run throughout this island. As so many people drive back and forward across the border this makes real sense.

Each road safety campaign involves a major investment of public expenditure by both governments and there is no doubt that by combining our efforts we produce a better product for all our citizens. Through that partnership over the last 9 years we have seen real changes in attitudes and behaviour – and have, I believe, saved many lives.

But we all know it's not just down to advertising. Road safety campaigns work best when the advertising is linked closely with active enforcement and I am therefore particularly pleased that we are joined by Deputy Chief Constable, Paul Leighton, from the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Commissioner Noel Conroy of An Garda Síochána. You are both very welcome and your support today once again underlines your continued commitment to road safety.

I am delighted that AXA Insurance will be supporting our new campaign and welcome Aidan Cassell, Executive Director of Business Operations with AXA, to our launch this morning. AXA supported our previous anti drink-drive campaign and once again we welcome his company's valuable contribution.

There is no doubt that in everyday life we are all faced with a wide range of decisions and choices. We look at the information available, anticipate the likely outcome and use this to make our choice.

When looking back over some of our own decisions I am sure everyone here today has at some stage accepted that 'with the benefit of hindsight' we would have done some things differently.

In the 5 years from 2000 to 2004 we saw 162 people killed on the roads in Northern Ireland because of driver alcohol or drugs. I am sure that if the drink-drivers had had the benefit of hindsight and seen the destruction they caused, they would make a very different decision. Had the victims had any choice I am sure they would have decided not to have been on the road at all on that particular day.

But the tragic thing is that it's too late. Those who have the "luxury" of being able to think about the events can do nothing about them.

The new Anti-Drink Drive advertisement we are launching today will leave viewers in no doubt as to the potential outcome of a decision to drink and drive.

The viewer is taken behind the statistics and beyond the crash scene. We see the pain of the victims - the loss they have suffered or the battle to regain something of what has been snatched from them. In effect we are trying to provide the luxury of hindsight without the horror and pain of the experience.

The stark reality behind our statistics and one of the hardest things for victims and their families to come to terms with is this fact:

- Drink driving does not happen by chance.
- Drink driving happens by choice.

Last year alone selfish choices resulted in the death of **30 people** and the serious injury of **124** people in Northern Ireland.

18 of these people were between 16 and 24 years of age – that's 15 young men and 3 young women.

Today we are optimistic that our new anti-drink driving campaign will help make at least some drivers recognise the 'point of decision'. The point at which they decide to commit to a course of action.

When they do reach that point and make that decision we hope they will do so with clarity about the human suffering that they might cause as a consequence.

A sound decision should be based on fact.

And the fact is – Just One drink will impair your judgement and your driving. This is a triple whammy – not only are you less able to drive – but you are less able to decide whether or not to drive and less able to turn down another drink.

A recent survey in Northern Ireland revealed that almost one third of motorists who drink said it **was likely** they would drive after one drink.

To all those drivers the message is clear - the only safe amount of alcohol if you are going to drive is none.

As a society, we must finally lay to rest any lingering doubts that drink-driving and its consequences are unintentional. There is nothing unintentional about drinking and driving.

You can decide not to drink.

You can decide not to drive.

You decide.

Make the right decision.

Thank you.