

Minister's Speech

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Might I extend a particular welcome to the young people and teachers who are here today. You are all very welcome.

We are here today to launch a new young people's road safety campaign, developed jointly by the Department of the Environment here in Northern Ireland and the National Safety Council in the Republic of Ireland.

This is the first campaign developed specifically for young people and I am delighted that both organisations have again worked together to produce a campaign that will run throughout the island.

In the world today the subject of 'safety' is rightly drilled into our young people from an early age. We strive to make you aware of the potential dangers you might face as part of your daily life.

However, you will be surprised to know that our research shows that from as young as 9 years old **road safety** is perceived to be a subject that only applies to "younger children". This is a dangerous attitude.

Half of all the deaths and serious injuries of young people on our roads between 1993 and 2003 resulted from how they behaved as pedestrians. Over 30% of the young people killed or seriously injured on our roads are passengers in cars.

There have been improvements. The number of young people killed and seriously injured on our roads is falling – from 236 in 2001 down to 171 in 2003. But this is still nowhere near good enough.

There is much good work going on and I must commend the efforts of my own Department's Road Safety Education Officers and the Road Policing Education Officers of the PSNI.

I would also like to single out the teachers who take the road safety message into the classroom each and every day. Your contribution to road safety is vital.

But if we want to see the numbers of casualties continue to fall we must make sure that road users from an early age understand the dangers of the road and the importance of how they behave on the road.

This is all the more important for those of you who are experiencing your first taste of freedom.

I am sure we can all relate to that stage in life when we want independence and our own space and no longer want to be under constant supervision. Added to the strength of pressure from our friends around us this greatly influences how we think and act.

What we hope this campaign will reinforce is that road safety is something that you can take responsibility for yourself. Don't wait for anyone else to tell you what you need to do to be safe on the roads. Do it because it's the smart thing to do.

I am pleased to see so many young people present at today's event. We are here today to try to ensure that each one of you has the opportunity to realise your potential and does not become another tragic statistic on our roads.

I hope that those of you who are in the advertisement enjoyed the experience. But can I stress the important part that you all play in this morning's event. And even more importantly the part you can play when you return to school. Please tell your friends what you have seen and heard and talk about the importance of taking responsibility for your own safety on our roads.

Remember, this is your campaign.

And every time you use the road remember to: "Stop. Look. Listen. Live."

We will now have the opportunity to watch the advertisement. First the Northern Ireland version will be shown, followed by what will be shown in the Republic of Ireland.

Thank you all very much.