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Tablet use potential cause of death in truck accident

A tragic crash that was potentially the result of a delivery-truck driver's tablet use has led the coroner to call for greater awareness of the risks of tablets as a distraction for drivers.

Coroner Heather McKenzie's findings from a case in which an elderly woman was struck and killed by a truck on Auckland's St Luke's Road, highlight ongoing issues around the unregulated use of tablets and similar devices while driving.

"In my view, the tablet's placement was a significant distraction and impediment for the driver in terms of overall driving vision, concentration, and safety," says Coroner McKenzie.



"I recommend that Police, WorkSafe, and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency undertake a joint safety campaign regarding the safe use of electronic tablets or other similar devices in vehicles. Drawing greater public attention to the issue will reduce the chances of further deaths occurring in similar circumstances."

The risks of mobile phone use while driving is currently a focus of various agencies' safety campaigns, and their use is regulated by the Land Transport (Road User) Rule 2004.

NZ Police, WorkSafe, and Waka Kotahi (NZ Transport Agency) actively promote safe driving behaviour to all road users.

"As a committed Road to Zero partner our dedicated road policing staff are out on our roads every day targeting and preventing unsafe behaviour to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads," says Superintendent Steve Greally, Director Road Policing.

"Any death or serious injury from a road crash is one too many, especially if it could have been prevented."

According to Waka Kotahi, almost a third of New Zealand drivers (32%) said they would text/message someone while driving. There are no comparable statistics for the use of tablets and similar devices, despite being commonly used in delivery trucks, courier vans, and recovery vehicles (tow trucks), or as GPS navigation aids.



“The road is the workplace for truck drivers, so any road death involving a truck is felt acutely by our industry,” says Road Transport Forum Chief Executive, Nick Leggett.

“Distraction is one of the big contributors to road accidents across the board, particularly involving looking at electronic devices while driving, or having them in the driver’s line of sight. We take on board what the coroner has said, and we will continue to work with government agencies to raise awareness about the use of tablets and similar devices truck drivers use for work purposes. It takes a sustained period of education to change behaviour and we are on board for that.”

One of the four main behaviours that contribute to death and injury on New Zealand roads is driving while distracted, and using an electronic device is a significant contributor to such accidents.

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