Crash data – when it's wrong, are we putting more lives at risk?

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Abstract

Port Stephens Council in NSW, is proactive in road safety and is evident by Council's award
winning educational programs & civil projects. Local Government relies on accurate data to review
and design treatments that aid in the reduction of casualty crashes on local roads.

Council is increasingly concerned over misreporting of crash locations within our LGA in official
records and is questioning how widespread the issue is?

Misreported crashes, unless corrected, can be a domino effect of treatments in the wrong location to
treat nonexistent crashes and at worst, misappropriation of Government funding in this critical area
of national focus.

Road Safety Issues

Firstly, as a fellow stakeholder in Road Safety, Council is not critical or unaware of the Police task
at a crash scene and the stressful situations that have to be faced in the line of duty. Port Stephens is
part of two Local Area Commands and issues highlighted are not exclusive to either area. What we
are stressing is that the accuracy of information is crucial in prevention of further incidents at or
near that location if an engineering solution can contribute to future gains in road safety.

In NSW, crash data is supplied by Police to RMS who then make the information available to
stakeholders and the public. Councils use the data and local knowledge to assess locations for road
improvement and for applications to Federal and State funding agencies for road safety projects.

Council's own investigation of the serious crash locations is undertaken to check possible road
related factors on local roads. In too many cases Council contacts Police or RMS to ensure the data
is correct on official fatal crash report or serious injury data. If this is not done, from our
experience, data goes on unchanged over many years. As a result, historical crash data for the most
recent five years that is used for funding of major projects can remain corrupted.

Port Stephens Council is questioning if the process of official logging of an event by generation of a
latitude and longitude location through descriptions such as a RUM code and location descriptions
such as '2km west of Pacific Hwy' as an example, has out lived its usefulness? When analyzing
crash data, these generic distances from intersections raise accuracy concerns immediately.
Stakeholders in road safety may be aware of this issue. Over the years at forums and conferences
the discussion of accuracy leads to a story of a 'trial of GPS locator where the crashes were recorded
in the police station', this urban myth has run its course when the technology exists on any device to
give a latitude / longitude position including the NSW State Government's promoted Emergency +
application for mobile phones.

Port Stephens Council has accumulated data and case studies of misreported crashes that we are
aware of, to assist accuracy of RMS / Police data official records (example on next page).
Port Stephens Council- Serious Crash Location Records: 2006 – 2017

One of these crashes listed had the property address of the fatal crash in the thorough Police narrative, which occurred in front of the driveway, and still was recorded as over 1 km in the wrong direction from the nearest cross street. This example raises questions such as, is the initial reported location by the public becoming the official crash location with a post generated latitude and longitude?

Port Stephens Council is concerned that the issues raised seem to be increasing regardless of available technology and is asking these questions to promote conversation that leads to a process change that benefits road safety for all our communities.