

SLIDE 1

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all I'd like to thank the hosts and the organizers for the invitation. It is an honor for me to be allowed to contribute to this conference.

The session is about 'road user behaviour', but for the following minutes I invite you to widen your view to the behaviour of more actors involved.

It is well known (and often said) that most car crashes are consequences of human failure. But nobody could seriously expect anything else. Let's keep in mind that injuries and fatalities happen even though most people involved in accidents do their best to prevent serious consequences.

My conclusion is that our transport system is much too powerful, much too dangerous and doesn't allow enough margin for error.

But, what can my contribution be to the start of the decade of action, as the father of a road crash victim?

I don't want to talk about statistics that most of us know. My part can be to remind you to not simply look at the numbers and that every individual fatality or serious injury is an apocalypse in its own right.

SLIDE 2

There was my son when he was 4 ... and a little later he was killed by this car.

SLIDE 3

There is a reason why I didn't show you a picture of my son, and there is a reason why I show you the car. In a previous Road Safety week there were photographs of victims shown by the former president of FEVR, Mrs. Brigitte Chaudhry. I sat in the last row of the auditorium and heard some male professionals joking about those killed. Even though they were regrettable exceptions, they are showing us one of the obstacles to improving road safety: It is a sort of emotional distance, that some people must or at least do develop while working in this field, constructing cars or simply driving cars and potentially being exposed to risking their own lives.

Now let's have a look at the car. There is a reason why Utility Vehicles are bought and constructed in the dangerous way they are. They symbolize power and superiority. Unfortunately this can only be achieved by increased danger, and sometimes it's even worse: In these cases danger is an inherent characteristic expressed by the car to be sold and to be driven.

SLIDE 4

This one has been called “attack”.

I have shown you only the tip of this iceberg, of course. Themes like superiority, power, aggression as well as social status can be discovered easily in many objects made of sheet. We come across another obstacle to improving road safety: It is a social factor, possibly related to testosterone.

SLIDE 5

As everybody knows, exceptionally many road crash victims are found in young male drivers up to the age of 25. This shows another aspect of the substance depicted. Obviously, testosterone as a biological factor disables some people at some time not only from acting safely, but also from factual thinking and deciding: Whether man can control the machine at any power and any speed is the one question, the other is to recognize our limited potency or better: virility.

Being at the point of human failure, don't let us try to change our nature, nor the basic behaviours in our culture.

But let us find different objects to demonstrate superiority and others to enjoy aggressive or risky games. Let us take our weaknesses rather as opportunities than as obstacles.

Let us not use a poor and dangerous traffic system as a standard to form our behaviour. The system should serve our nature with all its limitations and not the other way round.

This would be my suggestion for improving road safety.

Maybe I have one more: I grew up in Germany, now I live in Switzerland. One obvious difference occurs in the statistics of fatalities, another in the range of public transport.

At the end of the presentation I summarize the Obstacles and Opportunities:

SLIDE 6

1st Obstacle: Emotional distance and repression of risks

2nd Obstacle: Overload of the road system with social and psychological functions (status, power, freedom is also an aspect)

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3rd Obstacle appears to me: A Biological handicap to matter-of-fact discussion : Possibly Testosterone

SLIDE 7

We come to the opportunities:

1st Opportunity: Guide social and psychological functions into other fields (rather abstract)

2nd Opportunity: Restrict individual traffic and provide superior public transport.

3rd Opportunity: Build vehicles that are not so fast and powerful and therefore do less harm to vulnerable or enforce this measure seriously. Please.

If we really want to improve traffic safety with respect to vulnerable road users, we must build slow cars. At present, this is prevented by the obstacles mentioned before.

Thank you.