

DID YOU KNOW???

DROP THE “A” WORD

Roadway fatalities are soaring at rates not seen in 50 years, resulting from crashes, collisions, and other incidents caused by drivers. The operative words here are “caused by drivers”. So don’t call them accidents anymore!

This is the position of a growing number of safety advocates, including myself, that are campaigning to change the 100-year-old mentality that trivializes the single most common cause of traffic incidents – driver error.

“When you use the word ‘accident,’ it’s like God made it happen“, said Mark Rosekind, head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, at a driver safety conference in 2016. Almost all crashes stem from driver behavior like drinking, distracted driving and other risky activity. Only about six percent are caused by vehicle malfunctions, weather, or other factors.

Driving or riding in a car is the most dangerous activity for most people. Traffic safety advocates say that the persistence of crashes can be explained, at least partially, by widespread apathy toward the issue. Changing semantics by calling crashes what they really are and dropping the word accident, which implies that crashes are nobody’s fault – they just happen –, might be a good step in addressing the safety issue.

According to an article in the New York Times several years ago, the state of Nevada enacted a law on January 1, 2016, to change the word “accident” to “crash” in dozens of instances where the word is mentioned in state laws, like those covering police and insurance reports. In New York State, drivers involved in traffic crashes involving a fatality or personal injury, or involving \$1000 damage to any one person’s property, must report it to the DMV on form MV-104, “Report of Motor Vehicle *Accident*”. Most, if not all forms used by enforcement agencies in NYS continue to use the work “accident” rather than “crash”.

In 2014 New York City reportedly adopted a policy that states the city “must no longer regard traffic crashes as mere ‘accidents.’” At least 28 state departments of transportation have moved away from the term “accident” when referring to roadway incidents, according to Jeff Larason, director of Highway Safety for Massachusetts. You can begin to see the trend from “accident” to “crash” taking place throughout the US.

Furthermore, in New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL), Article 22 is about *Accidents and Accident Reports*. Sections 600 through 606 use the work accident throughout. I would suggest it’s time to revise VTL to change the wording of accidents to crashes like the state of Nevada did in 2016.

Interestingly, the NYS Driver’s Manual, Chapter 12 explains what a driver must do if you are in a traffic “crash”. The entire chapter never uses the work accident at all – the wording used is crash or incident.

Lastly, it’s also time for the media to get rid of reporting of “accidents” and insert wording like crash or collision. Change always comes hard and takes time, but the time to make the change is now.