

# REPORTING ON ROAD SAFETY

A GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS





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# PREFACE

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This guide is the result of four years of investment working with media on road safety in ten countries. Between 2011 and 2014, WHO reached over 1300 journalists through road safety workshops. Our hope was to increase their interest in and knowledge and understanding of this surprisingly complex issue. The end result we sought was not only more stories, but also more comprehensive and compelling stories on road traffic injuries and the impact these have on people's lives.

Every day around the world, 3400 people die in road traffic crashes. Lives are dramatically changed in a matter of seconds. While the crash events themselves often become news, the full stories behind these incidents – the who, why, how, and how could these have been avoided – are not often well developed.

But road traffic deaths and injuries can be prevented. The United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020 highlights the experiences mainly – but not exclusively – from high-income countries which point to concrete, effective interventions for changing how people behave on the roads and improving roads, vehicles and emergency care systems. In the context of the Decade of Action, efforts are being made to take these experiences to low- and middle-income countries where rapid motorization is evident and where more than 90% of road traffic deaths occur.

We know that far too many people die unnecessarily on the world's roads, even in high-income countries, and we know how to avoid this, but this knowledge unfortunately makes its way into the news only on rare occasions. The aim of this guide is to change that.

In the following pages, reporters will find new angles, examples of stories and projects from around the world, and tips from editors, reporters and public health experts.

We look forward to seeing more and more in-depth stories on road safety in the media soon and to witnessing a new era of road safety journalism focused on solutions and on saving lives.

Dr Etienne Krug, Director  
*Department for Management of Noncommunicable  
Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention  
World Health Organization*



**WHY YOU SHOULD  
READ THIS GUIDE**

# “YOU ARE MISSING ONE OF THE MAJOR NEWS STORIES OF OUR TIME”

By Tom Hundley, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting



Tom Hundley is the senior editor at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Before joining the Center, Tom was a newspaper journalist for 36 years, including nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* and as the *Tribune's* bureau chief in Jerusalem, Warsaw, Rome and London, reporting from more than 60 countries.

If you and your news organization are still covering road traffic fatalities the way news organizations have always covered them – as random, isolated “accidents” with sad but largely unavoidable consequences for the victims – you are missing one of the major news stories of our time.

Simply put, the carnage on the world’s roads is a public health crisis of epic proportions. The global death toll has already reached 1.24 million a year and is predicted to reach 1.9 million by 2030 unless something is done to reverse the current trend.

If statistics like these were the result of some microbe, some virus, some terrifying new disease, it would be a major news story. Journalists would write about the devastating impacts of this health catastrophe on communities and nations. Donor groups would mobilize funds for research for a cure. Global conferences would raise public awareness. Celebrities would lend their name to the cause.

But none of this happens for the all-too-familiar road traffic fatality. A typical news account describes an individual incident, briefly outlining the apparent cause of the crash, duly recording the names of the dead and

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