

## Quad bike fatalities costly - but manufacturers fail to act

Two new papers released today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* have highlighted the costs associated with fatal quad bike incidents and compared the behavior of the quads industry in opposing safety improvements to that of tobacco companies.

The papers from the University of Sydney's Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety (ACAHS), indicate that the costs for fatal incidents between 2001-2010 were \$288 million. "This conservative estimate draws on deaths data from the National Coroners Information System and includes projected losses in future earnings, impacts on household contributions, insurance payments, investigation and hospital costs" said Dr Tony Lower ACAHS Director. "The average cost was \$2.3 million, with the highest average being in those aged 25-34 years at \$4.2 million".

The report indicates that these costs are only the tip of the iceberg as they don't account for the pain and suffering incurred by families, friends and communities - nor the significant costs associated with life threatening and permanently life-changing non-fatal injuries such as spinal and head injuries.

"The real tragedy behind these figures is that most of these deaths are completely preventable. With around two-thirds of all deaths involving some kind of quad rollover, it has been estimated that fitting a crush protection device (CPD) has the potential to reduce deaths by up to 40%. If you add the use of all prevention strategies such as not carrying passengers, excluding children from using quads and wearing a helmet, this increases to 70%" stated Lower.

In an accompanying editorial for the *Journal*, the tobacco-esq attempts by manufacturers to divert attention away from the safety of their product is also described. The paper highlights that none of the companies have presented any of their own research on rollover protection in the public domain over the past 25 years. "It would be extremely naive to think that they have not undertaken such research given the large number of deaths associated with rollovers. The strategy to use external research agencies and not present their own information publicly also enables them to manage and outsource any potential legal risk".

The most recent independent assessment of industry information by Monash University reveals they have "misrepresented the true results", and undervalued the benefit from fitting a CPD. This is supported by real-life field information where quads fitted with some kind of protection device are under-represented in the fatal and injury statistics.

"Just like big tobacco the quad manufacturers continue to roll out dubious information and they clearly don't want a legal precedent set in Australia. The intense interest in what is happening here from the parent companies and major groups representing the industry in the USA is evidence of this. The primary reason for this is not user's safety as they often proclaim, rather it appears to revolve around the flawed safety of their product and the protection of their legal interests."

"With over 11,000 fatal cases in the US alone, the vested interests of the industry is understandably high. Tragically it appears manufacturers are continuing to put profits and fear of litigation, ahead of people's safety."

Quads can be useful vehicles especially within the context of agriculture, but they have to be safer before reaching farmers and other users. Further independent information on quad bike safety can be obtained from the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety (02 6752 5210) or by visiting [www.aghealth.org.au](http://www.aghealth.org.au) or Farmsafe Australia [www.farmsafe.org.au](http://www.farmsafe.org.au)

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Contact:

Dr Tony Lower

Director - Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

Ph: (02) 6752 8210