

City Talk



SAFETY MUST RULE AS TECH GETS US GOING ON ROADS

We may be aware of the vital importance of safety at construction sites, but not many will know that the fatality rate for traffic accidents far exceeds that at construction sites.

Fortunately, the SAR has stepped in to reduce that gulf with an update of the regulations.

The safe use of vehicles on public roads is governed by the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (chapter 374A).

These regulations have been in force for decades, but with vehicles in use worldwide undergoing technological innovations, they are due for an update.

The first has to be to the acoustic vehicle alerting system, which sees electrical vehicles emit warning sounds when operating at low speed, to alert pedestrians and other road users to their presence.

EVs are unlike their internal combustion engine predecessor that emit noises, and when they are on a roll, their quieter movement may not give adequate warning. Hence the need for the AVAS.

Another update must see over-height warning systems installed for vehicles with extendable aerial structures.

Lorries with lifting equipment have been involved in incidents where the tall devices were inadvertently not retracted when in motion on roads.

In a few cases, they have caught overhead structures, such as the bottom structures of viaducts and other highway furniture such as the catenary of tramways.

Fouling these structures or devices not only poses a danger to such lorry drivers but also to other road users.

Mandating a failsafe warning device to warn lorry drivers of overly high structures, ie, those extending beyond 4.6 meters, will ensure lifting devices are stowed away before lorries get on roads.

The third revision refers to the use of reflecting mirrors and digital mirrors to aid drivers' side and rear vision.

With such mirrors seeing wider appli-



Nuts and bolts

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cation for large vehicles with restricted side and rear lines of sight, it is necessary to legislate for correct use to ensure drivers have clear and reliable side and rear views.

There have been many recent incidents where drivers hit pedestrians at the sides and back of their vehicles because their line of sight has been impeded.

This amendment prescribes a minimum image quality, mirror view area and field of vision to ensure there are no blind spots when maneuvering in tight spots.

With more and more vehicles having remote control or automatic control of the parking function, an amendment to ensure clear detection of obstacles along the path of a vehicle is due.

For legal reasons, the driver must stay in or near the vehicle to be responsible for the safe movement of the vehicle.

Finally, with EVs entering wide use, there is a need to extend the types of EVs that can be used on expressways, beyond the cars and motorcycles already allowed.

This will allow commercial EVs to be used on expressways provided they are able to travel at speeds comparable to the maximum design speeds of conventional ICE-driven vehicles.

These amendments are now being debated in the Legislative Council for approval this year.

It is gratifying to see our government acting quickly to update the Road Traffic Ordinance to adopt modern technology, while not compromising the high level of safety that the public expects.

Engineers and Legco members can work effectively to ensure that this objective is met to ensure Hong Kong remains one of the most modern cities.

Veteran engineer Edmund Leung Kwong-ho casts an expert eye over features of modern life