

**Question on Notice
No.725
Asked on 23 May 2007**

MS BARRY asked the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (MS SPENCE) -

QUESTION:

- (1) Why has the Police Accident Investigation Squad been renamed the Forensic Crash Unit?
- (2) Will she outline the responsibilities of this unit?

ANSWER:

- (1) On 3 August 2006, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Senior Executive Conference considered a presentation that sought approval to implement strategies that would help the community overcome a psychological barrier that restricts its ability to appreciate that road crashes are not generally accidents but the result of criminal behaviour. One of the strategies endorsed by the Senior Executive was that the name of the Accident Investigation Squad should be changed as the Squad investigated crashes and criminal negligence. It did not investigate accidents.

A 'psychological barrier' is something that impedes a person's ability to change their behaviour. The terminology used to describe roles, functions, duties and incidents can create psychological barriers to performance and, over time, become part of the culture.

The biggest psychological barrier to reducing road trauma is continual reference to road crashes being accidents. Road crashes are rarely accidental, they usually occur because at least one party involved in the incident breached a Road Rule. The Road Rules provide a system for safe road usage and when adhered to there is no reason why all road users should not reach their destination safely. Breaching a Road Rule is a criminal offence as defined in section 3 of the *Criminal Code*.

The Police Service does not investigate road crashes as accidents. Section 2.3 of the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* defines the functions of the Police Service but it makes no reference to investigating accidents. The *Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995* and regulations provide a comprehensive set of road rules and proscribes duties for drivers involved in road incidents but makes no reference to accidents.

Road safety experts agree that attitude is the primary cause of road trauma. If attitude is the primary cause then there can be no change to that attitude if positive action is not taken to identify and eliminate psychological factors that contribute to the attitude. The QPS has taken a positive step by changing the name of the Accident Investigation Squad to Forensic Crash Unit.

The word “forensic” was selected because it means ‘of or for the court’. It also infers a use of scientific procedures. The Forensic Crash Unit uses scientific methods to reconstruct crash scenes and estimate course and speed. The Unit also produces forensic maps of major crime scenes regarding offences such as robbery, rape and murder. The Unit is always undertaking or involved with investigations regarding serious criminal matters. Using the word “forensic” complements this.

The word “crash” was selected because motor vehicle crashes constitute about 90 percent of Forensic Crash Unit taskings.

The new title is professional, reflects the work of the Forensic Crash Unit and informs the community that being involved in a road crash has very serious consequences. When members of the community see a Forensic Crash Unit vehicle at an incident site they will know the incident involved criminal behaviour and the police are committed to thoroughly investigating the incident.

(2) Forensic Crash Units exist throughout Queensland at various locations.

The role of a Forensic Crash Unit is to:

- (i) investigate fatal and serious injury road incidents, road incidents where there is evidence of criminal negligence and other major road incidents where the input and expertise of a FCU is required;
- (ii) investigate industrial or aircraft incidents where there is a fatality or the likelihood of a fatality;
- (iii) provide forensic maps of major crime scenes or other incident scenes and emergency lighting where required; and
- (iv) in the case of the Forensic Crash Unit, Brisbane, coordinate training and development in this area of operations throughout the Service.

A Forensic Crash Unit is also capable of undertaking incident reconstruction (collision analysis).

In areas where there are no Forensic Crash Units, selected police officers have been trained in incident investigation techniques. These trained investigators are available to provide some of the services that are provided by a Forensic Crash Unit.