

IMPERIAL PERSPECTIVES

Pledging support for road safety



Leon Schnel, Imperial's CEO, with Leonie Hemstra, Imperial's CEO, South Africa

A new campaign by the Imperial Group will see first Imperial staff and later the public in general pledging to improve their driving style and behaviour as pedestrians and adhere to the rules of the road. Leon Schnel spoke to Imperial's Tak Hiemstra to find out more.

Although road safety has always been a priority for the Imperial Group, the I-Pledge campaign – recently launched internally at events in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban – will see all of the Group's more than 35 000 employees encouraged to voluntarily pledge to comply with all the laws and regulations that apply to their use of South African roads.

I-Pledge originated with Imperial's Board Council. "It's a campaign to impress on Imperial employees and eventually the public the importance of road safety," explains Tak Hiemstra, Imperial Holdings' Executive Director and chairperson of the Brand Council.

"Imperial owes its existence to the roads – everything it does plays out on the roads. It was time to do something which is socially responsible in association

with what we do with all our businesses, it follows that it has to do with road safety."

Tak highlights the influential role which the Imperial Group plays within motorists' lives, with Imperial selling almost 20% of the cars in the country, running the largest trucking operation and renting out one in three of all rental vehicles.

"Every life lost is a tragedy," Tak said. "Despite our strong focus on road safety, Imperial has lost nine of its employees in road accidents in the past 12 months, while 48 more lost their lives in Imperial related road incidents. While this is a low number given that our vehicles travel almost a half a billion kilometres a year, it remains our commitment to prevent every fatality."

"We do a road safety report which the Executive Committee looks at every month, and all reports of fatalities are sent to the whole board of directors," reveals Tak. "There is a debate about it, why this accident happened, how it could have been avoided and what steps we are taking to ensure that our vehicles travel safer."

The I-Pledge campaign, based on its dedicated website and accessible by both computers and cellphones – <http://i-pledge.co.za> – is expected to go a long way towards bringing about the mind shift necessary to positively influence drivers' behaviour.

In addition to providing site visitors with weekly tasks and safe-driving tips, it also tracks records set by numerous divisions within the Imperial Group as their staff members take the pledge. At the time of going to print, more than 10 000 pledges had already been made, and the divisions in the I-Pledge Top 5 leaderboard all exhibited 100% participation.

Members of Imperial's Executive Committee are leading from the front in the campaign, with a new GPS-based monitoring system developed by Motor Vehicle Tracking having been installed in their cars. This system will generate weekly reports on their driving style – analysing factors such as speeding, harsh braking and

acceleration – and these reports will be published on the I-Pledge website ... under code-names, for the sake of a competition.

Once a sufficient number of Imperial's employees have signed the pledge, it will be extended to the broader public through radio advertisements, social media and other interactive campaigns. Tak feels strongly that road safety cannot simply be brought about by means of strict legislation, policing and roadside billboards.

"If you're sitting in the car for two hours a day and there's a situation of somebody wanting a gap in the traffic ahead of you, are you going to make way, or are you going to be an aggravated motorist who says, 'No, you're not getting in here!'" asks Tak. "You're not going to get to your destination earlier; it will just make the roads a more pleasant place to be on."

He feels that road safety needs to start with each driver taking a personal pledge to behave differently in their cars, in terms of avoiding drinking and driving, reading an e-mail or typing a text message on their cellphones. This is encompassed in the campaign slogan: 'Safer, friendlier roads start with you.'



Robert Bork, Imperial CEO, pledges the I-Pledge

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"I don't think that anybody who uses their cellphone regularly while driving should disagree that it's dangerous. Is it our right to keep doing it? Surely it's not our right, just like it's not our right to overtake over a solid white line or exceed the speed limit," says Tak.

As an added bonus of the campaign, Imperial will be going away 45 000 visibility bites to pedestrians or cyclists. Stickers are also being made available for placement on cars and motorbikes to serve as reminders.



Imperial's Executive Directors, Marko Gerdhewitz, Murray de Caster, Durban Office and Tak Hiemstra, signed the I-Pledge together.