

'It can happen to you,' says young survivor



PHOTO: JORDAN RICHARDS

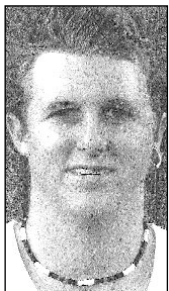
SMASHED UP: Jordan Richards was in a coma for a month after crashing this car.

By Samantha Graham

"You can't just pretend bad things will never happen to you." That's the view of 20-year-old Jordan Richards, who says most young people think they'll be safe no matter how they drive.

Richards thought he would always be safe, but in May 2005 he took a corner badly and crashed his car into a tree at almost 80kph.

Since then, he has spent almost a month in a coma, had open brain surgery twice and spent about 18 months re-learning how to walk and talk.



JORDAN RICHARDS

PHOTO: SAM GRAHAM

"One of the major things was that it really affected my memory – I can't remember the whole two months I was in hospital after I woke up from the coma," Richards says.

"The first thing I remember is leaving to go to rehab, and asking the ambulance driver to put his lights and sirens on."

Car accidents are responsible for a huge number of the injuries and fatalities that occur in New

Zealand every year.

Secretary for the New Zealand International Grand Prix Association Gary Lathrope says drivers need to realise that death

"People need to be scared into facing the facts."

is not the only consequence, and society should look at what can happen to crash survivors.

"Drivers often crash because they over-drive for their ability, and they drive faster than they can control," he says.

"There needs to be more of a focus on the consequences for people that survive crashes."

Lathrope says graphic advertising and real life examples are the only way to get through to people.

"The media only looks at the fatalities but they should be looking at all the angles.

"People need to be scared into facing the facts about what could happen to them."

Richards says people often don't understand how serious crashes can be.

"After the coma I wasn't walk-

ing or talking and I had half a head for six months.

"I had surgery to get an acrylic plate put in to replace the broken part of my skull.

"I think the whole thing cost somewhere around the \$60,000 mark."

Accident Compensation Corporation injury statistics for 2006 show that between July 2005 and June 2006, there were 70 new claims made for serious injuries caused by car accidents.

The number of ongoing claims for the same period came to almost 1300.

These injuries often need 24-hour care and the material and emotional cost of the accidents greatly affects society, victims and their families.

A Ministry of Transport report into road crashes found that the social cost of fatalities in 2005 was around \$1.2 billion.

The social cost of injuries was similarly high at about \$2 billion.

This cost includes both fees and the effect crashes have on victims.

As well as the hundreds of thousands in fees for his treatment, Richards says the emotional toll for both him and his family was huge.

"The doctors thought I was going to be a vegetable for my whole life."

False fire alarms cause 'cry wolf' syndrome

By Michele Coelho

An increasing number of false fire alarms in New Zealand are endangering people who ignore them when they go off.

New Zealand Fire Service safety officer Russell Dickson says there hasn't been a case of death or serious injury caused by an evacuation – but people have been trapped by fires because they ignored the fire alarm and didn't leave the building.

If more and more people start doing that, sooner or later there will be cases of people being overcome by fire resulting in serious injuries or even death, says Dickson.

Ignoring fire alarms is known as the Cry Wolf syndrome and it is most noticed in buildings with a high rate of false alarms.

"The ongoing false alarm activation does cause complacency by buildings' occupants."

He says if the building had only a couple of false fire alarms or not many, you'll find most people out in the street when the fire alarm goes off.

"When you have a building that had five or more false alarms in a year, you'll find the people just looking from the window," he says.

In a recent case of a false fire alarm at Wellesley Students Apartments on Mount St,

at 4.30am, fewer than half of the estimated 650 students left the building.

This was the second time the building had a false fire alarm this semester. International student Ainsley Breault, whose apartment is on the 13th floor, said that because it had happened before and she had to go down all the 13 floors by the

"I was all comfortable in my bed and I thought: I'm sure it's fake."

stairs, she decided not to evacuate this time.

"I was all comfortable in my bed and I thought: I'm sure it's fake," says the North American.

Dickson says: "What usually happens, especially in students apartments, is that if [students] don't see people leaving they don't leave as well."

That was the case with Laurianne Le Chalony, who lives on the 10th floor.

Le Chalony says she thought the alarm could be a real fire, but decided to check with her room mates.

As they wouldn't leave the building, she decided to stay too.

Statistics provided by the fire service shows that 44 per cent of all incidents reported in Auckland in the past 12 months were false alarms.

Dickson says that fire alarm systems detect fire but give more false alarms.

Over 90 per cent of false alarms are caused by the lack of ventilation inside apartments and the misplacement of smoke detectors, he says.

The New Zealand Fire Service has the right to charge a \$1000 fee on the third false alarm in a 12-month period.

But only false alarms caused by system and building maintenance, building usage, occupant activity and external environment will incur a charge.

Dickson says: "It wasn't until [building owners and occupants] started being charged that they started looking for solutions for the problem."

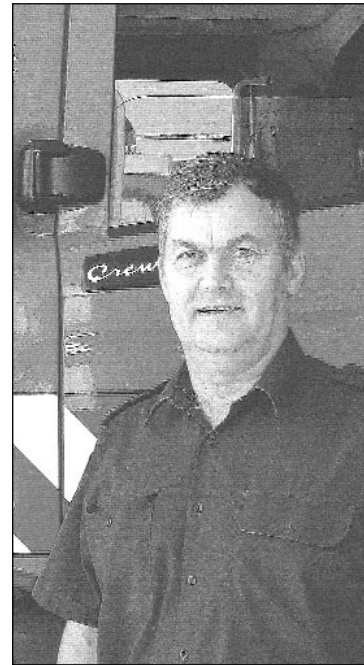


PHOTO: MICHELE COELHO

CRY WOLF: Safety officer Russell Dickson says people are too complacent toward fire alarms.

Smokers should move further from doorways, says ASH

By Chelsea Smith

Second hand smoke is still a problem in the workplace, according to anti-smoking group ASH.

The Smoke Free Environment Act amendment of 2004 saw smokers moved outside the work place when they wished to light up.

The amendment also banned smoking in bars, pubs, casinos and restaurants.

Now ASH says a further amendment to the act, which would see smokers moved away from the doorways of work buildings and other public places, may

be a good idea.

ASH spokesperson Sneha Paul says this would mean less smoke drifting into buildings where people have to work.

"This way, someone couldn't stick one foot outside a building and say they're technically outside and therefore able to smoke," she says.

Paul says there is not enough research at the moment to prove the exact effects of second hand smoke drifting into work places through open doorways.

"But it is certainly very frustrating for those non-smokers who have to work in it," she says.

According to ASH statistics,

5000 people die each year from smoking in New Zealand.

"Three hundred and fifty of those are second hand smoker

"Non-smokers are definitely the minority here."

and 140 of them are workers exposed to second hand smoke," says Paul.

Ideally Paul would like to have smokers moved a certain

number of metres away from doorways.

"Employers should actively encourage smokers to quit as well."

Telemarketing supervisor Wendy Ngaropo says 70 per cent of the employees smoke at the East Tamaki company where she works.

"Non-smokers are definitely the minority here," she says.

Part of the company's problem is where the smokers sit when they light up at break time.

"We have a big open doorway and the smokers sit in front of it. So of course all the smoke drifts back into the work place," she

says.

"We have had meetings about the problem and ideally we would like to move them away from the doorway – it's just a matter of where."

Many employees of the company agree it is not a perfect situation.

Melissa Farrell, 20, is a smoker and thinks a designated smoking area would be kinder to non-smokers.

Non-smoker Shane Quigley, 44, says it "stinks of smoke" inside the building.

"It would be great not to have to breathe in that crap while you're trying to work."