

SPOTLIGHT ON THE GARDAI WHO KEEP TRAVELLING PUBLIC SAFE



VIGILANT Sgt Coleman sets up checkpoint for valid tax and insurance



TESTING TIMES Driver is checked roadside for drugs



SNARED This driver was fined for using his phone

15

years - that's how long Sgt Coleman has served in roads policing

BY DANNY DE VAAL

THE faces of those killed in horrific collisions will be forever etched into my mind, a garda has admitted.

Sgt Gavin Coleman said colleagues in traffic policing sometimes get a bad rap from drivers who believe they are too harsh.

But he hit back and told how he has seen the devastating consequences of crashes caused by motorists who have used their mobile phone, broken the speed limit or driven under the influence of drugs or drink.

He explained: "If you think about last year, 184 people died on the roads. "And on every one of those road traffic collisions, there was a number of gardai who were at the scene and saw the devastation.

"That's 184 lives but it's also 184 families that have been destroyed.

"They have mothers and fathers. They have friends. All of those people will never see that person again.

"It's a ripple effect. There's so many more people that have been affected and unfortunately, year on year it keeps happening."

When asked about his personal experience of attending a fatal crash, Sgt Coleman added: "I think for every guard, it's different and depending on who the victim is, it's different as well.

"I've been lucky enough not to be at the scene of a child losing their life.

"I have kids myself and even thinking about turning up at a scene where a child has lost their life - I'm feeling it emotionally. You'd never ever get over that.

"I've been in roads policing for 15 years and I've been at a number of fatal collisions in that time. I remember each one like it was yesterday.

"You attend the scene and you do your job as a professional and then try and move on but the images stay with you. It can take its toll on you".

Sgt Coleman said we need to return to the basics when it comes to safe driving.

He added: "Driving a car is the most difficult and dangerous thing you

With drugs and drink driving, speeding & carelessness it's little wonder it can be..

184

people lost their lives on Ireland's roads last year

Hell on our roads



PAPERS PLEASE Sgt Coleman asks to see tax and insurance

IT was shortly after 7am on December 19 when Sgt Gavin Coleman and his observer noticed something awry amongst the thousands of vehicles hurtling down the M50 during rush hour.

Despite it being pitch dark, a truck with a cherry picker attached was driving in the middle lane with no lights.

Sgt Coleman flicked on the blue lights and the driver was pulled over. He claimed he was on the way to a mechanic to get the lights fixed in south Dublin after driving from Wicklow and admitted it was "stupid".

The driver and passenger were then told the truck was to be seized and would not be released until the lights were fixed.

Sgt Coleman said if the driver had to brake suddenly, the motorist behind may not have had enough time to react or notice and it could have caused a major multiple-vehicle collision.

This was the first offence but certainly not the last, the Irish Mirror witnessed during a day with officers from the Roads Policing Division based out of Dublin Castle.



SEIZED Lorry driver had no tax or insurance



WHEELY CARELESS Cyclist was on phone as he broke red traffic light

Officers stationed here have

Eyes & ears of enforcement on M50 rush hour

responsibility for the entire city and county while also assisting local officers.

Over the course of the morning, a number of drivers, including a lorry driver, were spotted using their mobile phones.

Each offender was issued with three penalty points and a fine.

Shortly before 12pm, Sgt Coleman saw a cyclist go straight through a red light at the Christchurch junction while chatting on the phone.

The cyclist had no helmet, no high-viz vest or lights.

When officers eventually caught up to him on Dame Street, he was still chatting on the phone and oblivious to the fact he was being pursued.

Officers then mounted a checkpoint in

3

points and a fine were issued to offending drivers on the M50

West Dublin. An app on garda-issued phones allows them to determine by simply inputting the number plate if a vehicle is taxed, insured, and details about the driver.

One woman who had been made redundant had no tax on her car.

After a brief chat and vow to purchase the tax disc, Sgt Coleman used his discretion and did not issue a ticket but said if she is caught again she could have the vehicle seized.

The driver was also directed to present the new disc for verification.

Later, a lorry on the M1 was seized for having no insurance.

Gardaí offered the man a lift off the motorway but he instead decided to walk through a field.

During my time with the Roads Policing Division, I witnessed multiple offences.

Some may consider them "minor" but those minor infractions can lead to carnage. That's why the

gardai want to stamp them out through engagement and education but if that doesn't work, they will use enforcement.



MADNESS Truck driven in dark on M50 without lights

will do on a daily basis. Drivers now more than ever need to be more observant.

"Concentrate on what is in front of you, to either side and behind you.

"React to the hazards that present themselves and do not get distracted, particularly from your mobile phone.

"Safe driving takes a lot of concentration. I think with the rush of modern

society, we have forgotten that. A split second is all it takes for a tragedy to happen.

"We all share the roads. We all have a personal responsibility to make them safer."

Sgt Coleman also revealed drug-driving on Irish roads "is a big problem" and the worrying trend "doesn't seem to be abating".

But he vowed advances in technology will mean more people will be caught.

Officers can now detect the presence of cocaine, cannabis, opiates, and benzodiazepines at the roadside in minutes using a device similar to a Covid-19 antigen test.

Sgt Coleman told the Irish Mirror:

"Drug driving, in my opinion, has always been around, but advances in technology means we can now detect it with roadside testing kits.

"We have transferred to a more efficient way of testing using drug sticks.

"Beforehand, the testing machine had to be carried around in the car whereas now it's as small as a Covid

test. We can carry them in our pocket. So it's a big change for us because our members, especially those on motor-cycles, can carry them. This means we're able to test a lot more people.

"We're catching an awful lot of people. It's primarily cannabis and cocaine. Cannabis is probably No1 followed very quickly by cocaine. It

Licensing reform link to offences

EXTENDED licensing laws could lead to more drink-driving, Alcohol Action Ireland has warned.

It said research from Norway shows increased trading was linked to an rise in deaths - particularly on rural roads.

Researchers also said there was a spike when there was limited public

transport. The new Alcohol Bill will allow bars and restaurants to open until 12.30am while some pubs will keep serving until 2.30 am. Clubs would be allowed stay open until 6am.

AAI boss Dr Sheila Gilheany said: "Sadly, there has long been a strong link between alcohol and road deaths

is a worrying trend that doesn't seem to be going down.

"We will continue to be out there, we will mount checkpoints and test people who we believe consumed intoxicants.

"We will continue to test people who are driving while we believe they are impaired such as by the usual

indicators, like veering across lanes. A driver can be tested under three different circumstances.

"If a Garda suspects you have consumed an intoxicant, if a driver has committed a road traffic offence.

"But gardai also have the power to randomly test any driver stopped at a mandatory intoxicant test check-

point. This is authorised by an inspector and anyone stopped can be tested."

Sgt Coleman also made clear prescription drugs which can impair a motorist's driving fall into the same category as cocaine or cannabis. He said: "It's important to note that it's not necessarily controlled drugs that we're looking for. We're also looking for prescription drugs that can impair driving.

"Codeine, for example, will come up as a positive result.

"If that's coupled with evidence of impaired driving such as weaving back and forth, you will end up with the same charge, it's intoxicated while driving. You will end up in court and

if convicted, you face a fine and a driving ban for a period of 12 months.

"So those sorts of drugs that you get on prescription from your GP if you're told not to drive while you're on these drugs, you can't drive while you're on them.

"Because you could well be stopped and you could be brought to court and convicted.

"Education plays a role in making our roads safer. People need to be aware of the dangers of drug driving and make the right choice.

"We want them to know that this is not the right thing to do and to be more responsible. It's all about being more responsible on our roads."

Figures released by the Garda Press

Office show 5,733 were arrested last year for drink-driving while 3,130 were nabbed for being behind the wheel while under the influence.

Over the Christmas period from December 1 until January 4, officers mounted 8,199 checkpoints, 4,679 of which were for mandatory intoxicant testing.

They arrested 818 drivers on suspicion of driving under the influence of an intoxicant.

This equates to one arrest every hour during this period.

A quarter of these arrests were for the suspicion of driving under the influence of drugs having failed a roadside DrugWipe test.

news@irishmirror.ie



DEDICATED Sgt Gavin Coleman