

## Aequology's Blog

*Corporate Social Responsibility & Sustainability*

# Is road safety a relevant CSR issue?

FEBRUARY 22, 2011 BY FREDERIC PAGE

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(<http://aequology.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/road.jpg>)

Photo: José Cuervo Elorza @Flickr

The **Commission on Road Safety**, a Non-Standing Committee of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, has approved unanimously a motion urging the Government to **include road safety as part of Corporate Social Responsibility**, in an effort to involve companies in the **prevention of work-related traffic accidents**. The initiative calls for the Executive to make appropriate amendments in the Law on Prevention of Occupational Risks to include the assessment and the prevention of traffic accidents that occur as a result of work activity or commuting. According to the Committee's recommendations, **companies would have to**

**report on their progresses** on the prevention of work-related accidents and carry out studies and evaluations to identify – and fight – their causes. The Committee also calls for the registration of work-related traffic accidents, a better coordination between the private and public entities involved, and security improvements in work-related travel. Finally, it asks for the creation of a “quality label”, awarded by the competent institutions and agencies, which would support the company’s commitment in preventing accidents among their employees. As an incentive for the employer, the Committee recommends the creation of an annual prize that would reward best practices in the field of occupational health and the quality of the inclusion of road safety plans in the Corporate Social Responsibility strategy of the companies.

This news has been received with mixed feelings in Spain, both by companies and the CSR community alike. One of the reasons, as stated by Professor **Antonio Argandoña** in his [blog](http://blog.iese.edu/antonioargandona/2011/02/16/responsabilidad-social-todo-cabe/) (<http://blog.iese.edu/antonioargandona/2011/02/16/responsabilidad-social-todo-cabe/>), is that this type of initiatives is a **distraction from the “really important” CSR topics** and that an “award” won’t change anything. According to other comments, it is **the role of the Government** to deal with road safety. **I don’t agree at all with those points of view.** I do believe that **road safety is a valid material issue** for businesses, a clear area of concern for their internal and external stakeholders and has potentially a **huge impact, economic, social and environmental on the companies themselves and the society in general.** In Spain, businesses lose thousands of working hours each year due to medical leaves of absence related to road accidents, that also cost thousands of lives. Industry research shows that typically workplace injury costs are met 40% by the employee, 30% by the employer and 30% by the community as a whole. The human cost is high, the financial cost as well. Corporate reputation is also affected by employees driving behaviour. Did it ever happen to you to observe a dangerous driver in a company car, or truck, bearing the logo of their employer? What was your reaction? The impact on environment is high too, not only due to bad driving behaviours, generating huge amounts of CO2, but also because of accidents involving dangerous goods or substances.

In a recent [post](http://csr-reporting.blogspot.com/2011/02/interesting-times-for-sustainability.html) (<http://csr-reporting.blogspot.com/2011/02/interesting-times-for-sustainability.html>), CSR expert and author [Elaine Cohen](http://www.twitter.com/elainecohen) (<http://www.twitter.com/elainecohen>), writes that she believes that, in the **next generation of GRI indicators**, “G4”, “other issues that are not specifically covered in G3, should be considered, such as the **issue of road safety and how companies manage employees who spend a lot of time on the road for work purposes, a significant source of fatalities and other accidents which endanger not only employees but the general public**”. I couldn’t agree more. Many companies already include road safety in their CSR plans and strategy. Some of them because they are directly or indirectly, related to the transportation industry, or vehicle manufacturers such as Ashok Leyland. Others, because they realize that there’s an opportunity for them to improve their workers well-being while impacting positively other areas such as the environment and public safety. It is much better for an organisation to be promoting a good news safety story such as winning an award, than it is to have to react to and suppress the outcomes of a major incident. Those companies also realize that their initiatives directly impact their bottom line and that they can gain a competitive advantage by being ahead of more reactive organisations.

World Health Organisation data suggests that approximately 1.2 of the 5 million global injury deaths each year are road crashes. It’s clear that road safety is a major social issue. I believe that it is also a business issue. What do you think?

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### About Frederic Page

Learning & Development professional, based in Barcelona, Spain. Blogging about Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility.

## 9 Responses to *Is road safety a relevant CSR issue?*

### elaine cohen says:

February 22, 2011 at 12:24 pm

Hi Frederic, thanks for bringing this point up. I see that we agree. When I am writing reports in my local market, Israel, this point is crucial, as we have a higher accident rate than most other european countries, so I always try to include what a company is doing in this respect. Road safety is a core CSR responsibility because giving people cars or trucks for work purposes is entrusting them to behave both legally and responsibly, and this must be measured and managed so that no harm is caused to employees or the general public. Equally, this makes a lot of sense for business sustainability – costs of dealing with car accidents are horrific in any business, both in terms of repairing cars, but more importantly, repairing people and finding replacements in the workplace for those who are injured or even worse, as well as high insurance costs for accident prone drivers etc. Every cent or euro invested in road safety is a contribution to business, community and individual sustainability . What a positive and significant development for the Spanish Commission on Road Safety.... which reminds me how much I miss Spain – I haven't been for a long while... I will have to schedule a trip .... but I won't hire a car!

elaine

<http://www.csr-reporting.blogspot.com>

### Reply

### aequology says:

February 22, 2011 at 2:45 pm

Hello Elaine! Thank you for your comment. Thanks also for highlighting the legal obligations that companies face and the ROI of road safety initiatives, for businesses and for the society in general. Going beyond compliance on this specific topic is definitely necessary to reduce the social, economic and environmental impacts. In Europe the situation is very different from a country to another, partly because of the law and public commitment to solve the issue, but it seems that business involvement also contributes to the situation. The indicator of "fatalities per million inhabitants" in 2009 shows that the average for the UE was 69, ranging from 38 in the UK to 130 in Greece and Romania. Spain with 60 had improved compared to previous years but there's still a lot to do here.

For your next visit to Spain, come to Barcelona, you won't need a car, you can take my bike!

### Reply

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**Gaston Bilder** says:

February 22, 2011 at 4:17 pm

Frederic and Elaine,

Thank you for raising the issue. I share the view that this should be part of mainstream CSR. I used to work for a Bp affiliate and prior to the Deepwater incident, traffic accidents were globally the first cause for deaths and injuries in the industry. My prior employer made safe driving, one of its main CSR action lines (not only within the company and its suppliers, but rather as a cause for social campaigning). I understand that many developing countries (e.g. there was an article on The Economist on this topic a couple of weeks ago), see raising pedestrian deaths as a by-product of wealth and lack of serious controls.

Best regards,

Gaston Bilder

### Reply

**aequology** says:

February 22, 2011 at 4:28 pm

Thank you for your comment and for sharing your experience Gaston. You're absolutely right road safety must be considered in a broader sense and it's great that you also mention pedestrians. I would also add cyclists to the list of people who can suffer directly and indirectly from bad driving habits. Positive initiatives, voluntary and well beyond compliance, rather than reactivity from companies can definitely help improving the situation.

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**Carol Sanford** says:

February 27, 2011 at 2:23 am

So glad to see this Frederic, and Elaine comments as well. I think businesses too often make Responsibility a program issue rather than a philosophy of business. Responsibility is about knowing that we have effects on in the world and taking responsibility for them. Most people and businesses feel they can take care of their duty by selecting programs for narrowing that. And governments also. Elaine's book works to push us beyond this narrow view to tell businesses that their people have to have it embeded in their way of working. I am tried to add to that they idea that is must be the DNA of the business and the everything is considered starting with strategy and embedding into work systems. Good reminders that road safety is a big deal for many communities. Loved the post

### **Reply**

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