

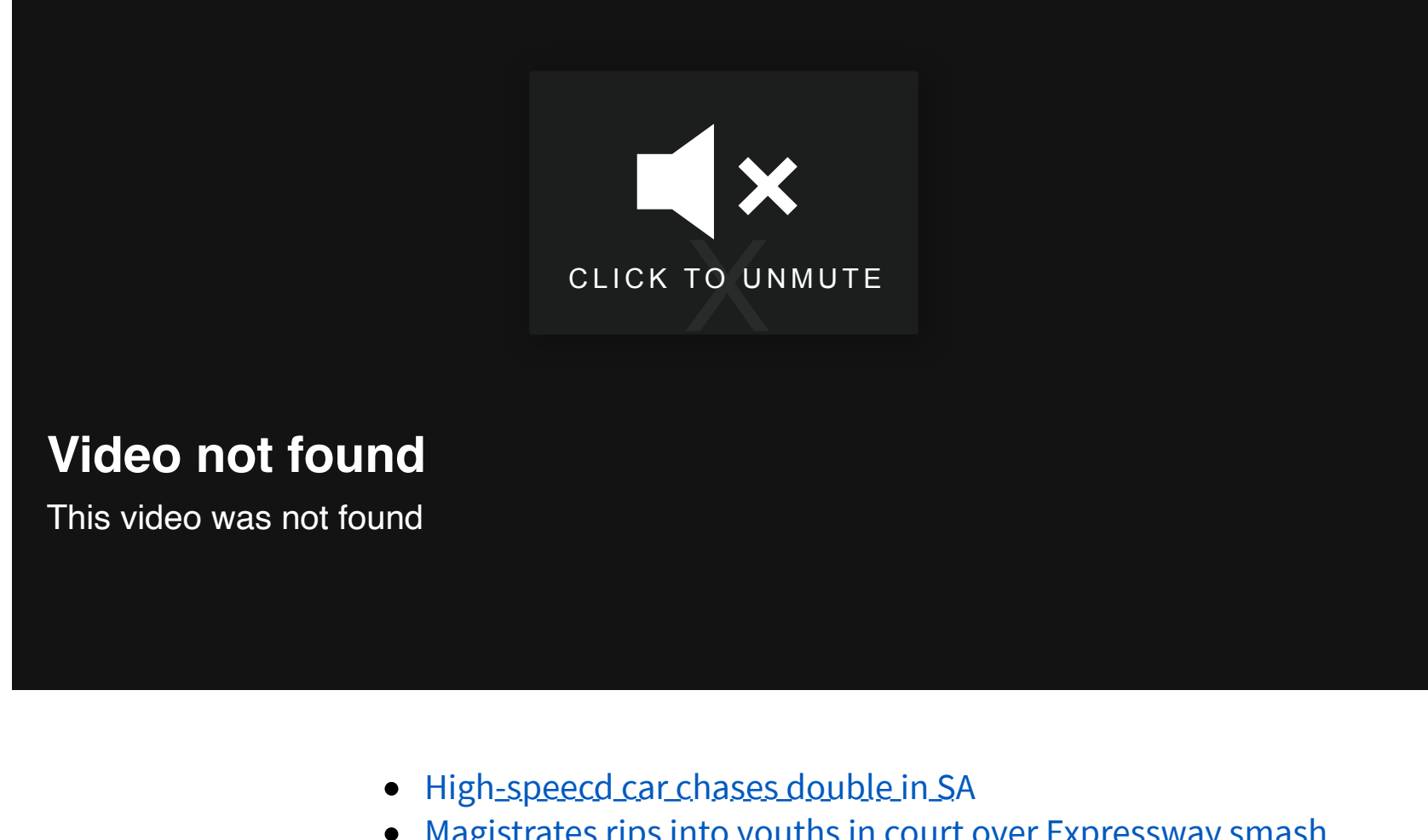
## Mark Carroll: If you've never attended a serious traffic accident, you can't begin to understand the horror

RECENTLY I attended Graduation Day at the Fort Largs Police Academy. It was a perfect spring day — a cloudless blue sky and warm without being hot.

**Mark Carroll** President of the Police Association of South Australia

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RECENTLY I attended Graduation Day at the Fort Largs Police Academy. It was a perfect spring day — a cloudless blue sky and warm without being hot.

At the conclusion of the formalities, our new probationary constables did what Academy graduates have done for years: cheer loudly and toss their hats into the air. It's an exuberant and traditional gesture of achievement, relief and excitement at what the future holds.

You can't help but be moved at the sight of 20 or so young South Australians about to join the police family and embark on a career serving their communities. Those of us who've been around for a while know that policing can be exciting, rewarding and personally fulfilling work. We also know that it's not a career for the faint-hearted.

As I watched the hats fly through the air, I reflected on the coming festive season and the almost inevitable rash of road accidents. I hoped these young probationary constables wouldn't have to attend a road accident too soon — at least until they find their feet and build their resilience up a bit.

If you've never attended a serious traffic accident, you can't begin to understand the horror.

You can cope with the dust, the broken glass, the bent, ripped metal and the spilt fuel.

It's the screams, the moans and desperate cries for help that can get to you. And then there are the injuries; some you know are going to be life-changing, some life-ending.

Regardless of how many crash scenes you've attended in the line of duty, it doesn't get any easier. You don't know what you're going to confront until you're actually on the scene so anxiety can kick in early.

If you get there before the ambulance, you often have to administer emergency aid at the direction of the ambos who are still racing to the scene themselves.

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You just focus on the job at hand and do what you're trained to do. You're busy and you don't have time to think about yourself.

But it's the aftermath. You knock off after your shift, sometimes you're left with the pitiful cries of parents, seriously injured themselves, screaming at the first responders to help their children first. You take all this home with you.

To the end of November, 88 South Australians died on our roads in 79 fatal crashes. Picture: Stephen Laffer

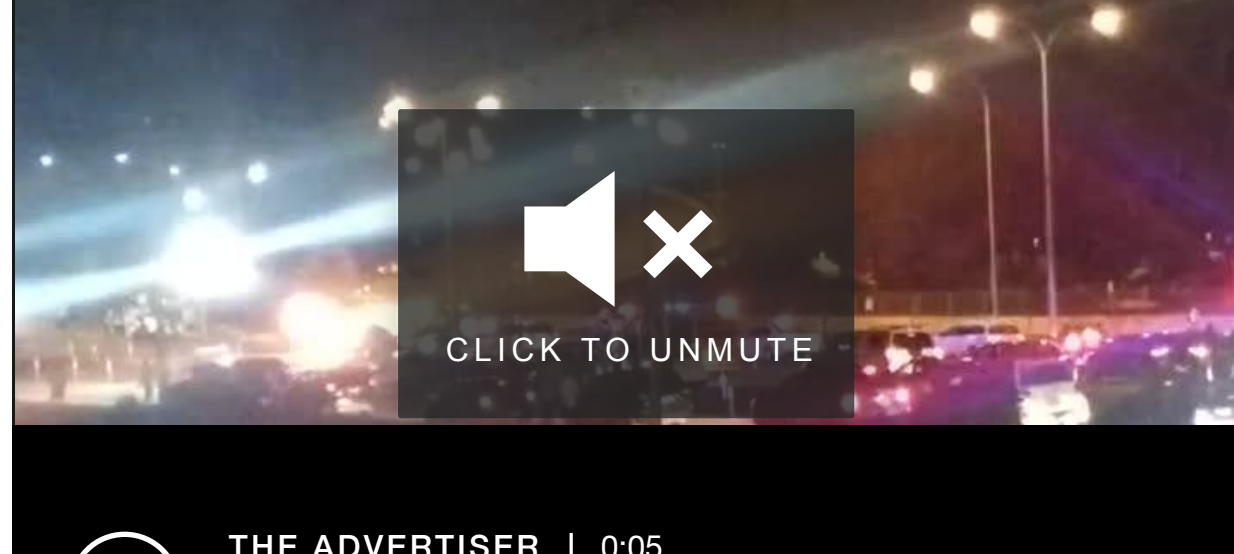
You think about your own kids; you can't help it. Sometimes you talk to your mates about it. Sometimes you don't. Sometimes you just bottle it up because you know you have to get into that patrol car or onto that bike in 12 hours' time and do it all again.

Consider this: to the end of November, 88 South Australians died on our roads in 79 fatal crashes. There were 635 really serious injuries sustained as a result of 546 serious crashes. Down the scale a bit, 5912 casualties were sustained in 4733 crashes.

But these are just numbers, bald statistics, devoid of humanity. Unless it happens to us or someone close to us.

We're told time and time and time again what causes traffic accidents. We know that on the road speed, alcohol, drugs and fatigue are the main killers. And then there's the inattention arising from a preoccupation with our mobile phones.

It's grimly instructive that most fatal crashes and serious injury crashes involve people between the ages of 20-24 and 40-49. Twice as many men die in car crashes as women. Perhaps counterintuitively, the majority of crashes happen during the week in daylight hours.



And then there's the holiday season. We know that inexperience and country roads can be a fatal combination. Many of us drive in the metropolitan area for 50 weeks of each year. For two weeks, we take to the open country roads, oblivious to the specific risks and dangers posed by what we see as the freedom of long, open stretches of bitumen.

My mind returns to 20 excited, young probationary constables and their hats tumbling through the air. They are in our family now. I hope they'll be okay. I hope they won't have to do attend a road fatality too soon.

I hope their families and friends will understand and have patience with their inevitable reactions to the stressful, traumatic events that are a necessary part of their service.

I hope they learn to turn to their workmates. I hope they're smart enough to understand that psychological injuries incurred in the line of duty are as honourable as physical injuries. I hope they're smart enough to know when they need help — and courageous enough to ask for it.

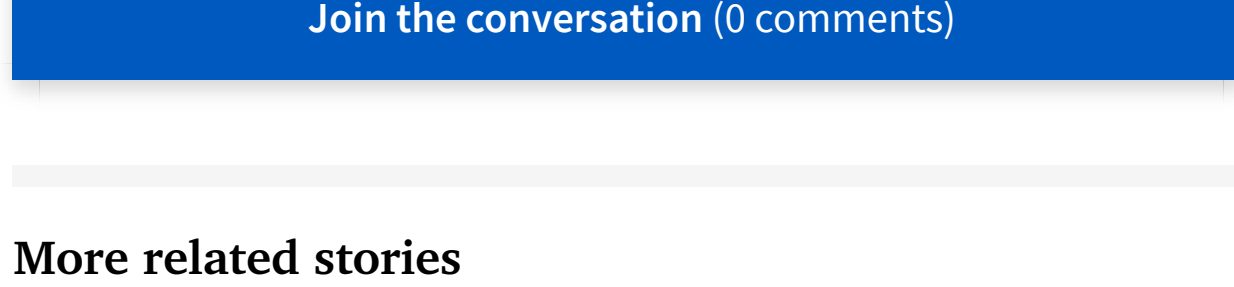
And I hope all South Australians drive very, very carefully these holidays. If you won't do it for your family, do it for ours.

**Mark Carroll is the President of the Police Association of South Australia.**

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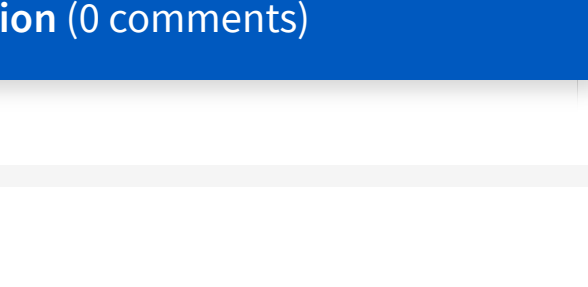


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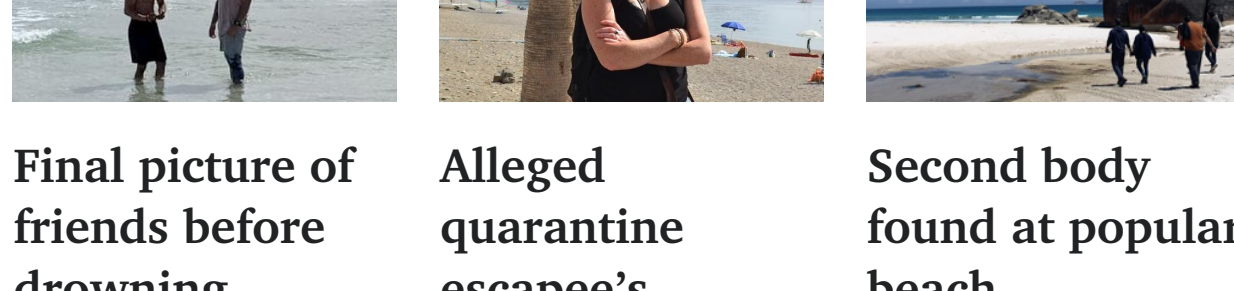
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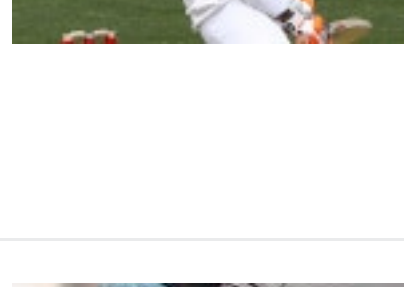
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