

# Victims protest against drunk driving

## TRIBUNE REPORTER

CATCH a wake-up, South Africa. Drunk driving is out of hand and it's not an accident – it's a choice.

With these words in mind, Caro Smit, a social worker whose 23-year-old son, Chas, was knocked over and killed in September 2005, took to the Pietermaritzburg streets this week with a small group of demonstrators, including paralysed accident victim Regan Peters.

"We don't need more paraplegics," was Peters' message.

"Stop drinking and driving," was the call from Smit, who last year won the Evert van Niekerk "Road Safety Achievement of the Year Award". This was in

recognition of her lobby group South Africans Against Drunk Driving.

Smit says more than 18 000 people are killed and 150 000 injured in car crashes every year in South Africa, with half of these caused by alcohol.

"This percentage is twice the world average. Many of the victims are under the age of 30. This figure is predicted to rise 80% by 2020. This year it is predicted to be 21 000," said Smit.

"We have been described as a nation who has no commitment to being responsible for our actions. Until the laws are properly enforced, South Africans will still think it is acceptable to drive drunk," said Smit.

She says while our drinking and driving laws are among the

best in the world, the implementation is "terribly forgiving".

"Although the South African Road Traffic Act allows a 10-year sentence for drunk driving and a R180 000 fine, the reality of the outcome is very different," said Smit.

With today being the World Day for Remembrance of Crash Victims, Smit has called on religious people from all faiths to mobilise against drunk driving.

"We need to get this campaign into the schools, Sunday schools and churches.

"Road carnage affects us all. At present, it is only the people who have lost loved ones who are working hard – for us it is too late. Our loved ones are dead or badly injured, but that makes us even more passionate about

trying to save other children," said Smit.

"For those of you who have not yet lost anyone, please be proactive. Remember, death is permanent."

On the loss of her son, Smit said, "The pain is with you forever. For a parent it is like an amputation – part of yourself is removed, and you are never the same again."

"For the injured it is also life-altering, traumatic and exceptionally costly, both in financial and emotional terms," said Smit.

Smit, who works as an alcohol and drug abuse counsellor, has set up a website [www.sadd.org.za](http://www.sadd.org.za) for people wanting treatment for alcohol problems.



'WE DON'T need more paraplegics,' was the message from road accident victim Regan Peters, at this week's demonstration against drunken driving in Pietermaritzburg. Peters said that if he had been wearing his seat belt, he would not be paralysed today