

Cullen announces 31 new Penalty Point offences and outlines process on Random Testing

Penalty Point offences also to feature Fixed Charges

New high level Ministerial Road Safety Group announced

The Minister for Transport, Martin Cullen TD today (Thursday, 26th January 2006) announced 31 new penalty point offences as part of a major crackdown on irresponsible driver behaviour. Among the new offences, to apply from April, are failure to obey stop/yield signs, illegal overtaking, failure to obey traffic lights, crossing the white line, failure to wear child restraints and driving a HGV or bus on the outside lane of a motorway.

The move brings to 35 the total number of penalty point offences. Minister Cullen also announced that fixed charges will apply on 30 of the penalty point offences. (Full details attached). He also announced that a new high level Government Road Safety group, comprising of the Ministers for Transport, Justice, Finance, Health and Education is to be formed. The group, to be chaired by the Minister for Transport, will also include senior Government officials.

The 31 new penalty point offences are targeted to take effect from April, following indications from the Gardai that the new IT processing system will then be in place. Minister Cullen put drivers on notice that they run the risk under 35 headings of incurring penalty points on their licence, increased fines and, if they repeatedly offend, automatic disqualification from driving.

Minister Cullen said: "Reckless drivers, putting their lives and those of other road users at risk, are the target of these measures. There is no getting away from the stats that show 86% of road deaths can be directly attributed to irresponsible driver behaviour.

"In terms of the application to date of the penalty point system, the offences of speeding, no seat belts, no insurance and careless driving are critical to road safety. The addition of 31 new offences are key elements of the overall strategic approach to road safety and are central to the development of a greater culture of safety on our roads."

Minister Cullen acknowledged that this major extension of the application of penalty points has been delayed because of difficulties with IT systems. He said: "For this reason, penalty points have so far only been applied on a manual basis. We need to improve efficiencies and the Garda IT system can achieve this. I look forward to the key role the new IT system will play. While the impact of the penalty points system has waned since first introduced, it has shown the potential that exists for its broader application to road safety offences.

"Today's announcement, by substantially increasing the amount of penalty point offences, will highlight the downsides attached to dangerous and irresponsible driving. This extension can have a positive impact on road safety. However, that impact will be given maximum potency when the new points are fully enforced."

On fixed charges, Minister Cullen announced that 30 of the 35 penalty point offences will feature fixed charges of between €80 and €120. In the case of the remaining 5 offences detection will lead directly to a court hearing.

The option of paying a fixed charge provides for the incentive of accepting lower levels of penalty points. This reflects the overall objective of improving the behaviour of individual drivers before they reach the threshold level of 12 points which triggers automatic disqualification for 6 months.

As of the end of December 2005 over 291,800 drivers have had penalty points endorsed on their licences and 19 stood disqualified at that date.

In the case of all fixed charges, a person has 28 days from the date of the fixed charge notice to pay. Anyone who pays in the subsequent 28 days pay that amount increased by 50%, meaning that it is only following expiry of that 56-day period that court proceedings will be initiated.

On Random Testing, Minister Cullen said: "I have been engaged in a very detailed process of consultation with the Attorney General through which we have sought to identify a system of random breath testing that would, on the one hand establish a balance between the legitimate expectation of society as a whole that the level of road deaths and injuries must be dramatically reduced and, on the other the rights of citizens generally.

"The Attorney General has now provided the Government with advice that will allow us to proceed to develop a scheme for the operation of random breath testing in a targeted and sustainable manner.

"I will now bring forward legislative proposals that will allow the Gardaí to establish road checkpoints for random breath testing at which all drivers may be required to submit to a preliminary test. The legislation will also provide the basis for the production of clear guidelines that will establish definite parameters for the application of these proposed checkpoints", he concluded.

ENDS

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31 New Offences that will incur Penalty Points

Offence	Penalty Points on Payment	Penalty Points on Conviction	Fixed Charge	
			Amount paid in 28 days	Amount paid in next 28 days
Dangerous overtaking	2	5	€80	€120
Failure to act in accordance with a Garda signal	1	3	€80	€120
Failure to stop a vehicle before stop sign/ stop line	2	4	€80	€120
Failure to yield right of way at a yield sign/ yield line	2	4	€80	€120
Crossing continuous white line	2	4	€80	€120
Entry by driver into hatched marked area of roadway, e.g. carriageway reduction lane	1	3	€80	€120
Failure to obey traffic lights	2	5	€80	€120
Failure obey traffic rules at railway level crossing	2	5	€80	€120
Driving a vehicle on a motorway against the flow of traffic	2	4	€80	€120
Driving on the hard shoulder on a motorway	1	3	€80	€120
Driving a HGV or bus on the outside lane on a motorway	1	3	€80	€120
Failure to drive on the left hand side of the road	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to obey requirements at junctions, e.g. not being in the correct lane when turning onto another road	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to obey requirements regarding reversing of vehicles, e.g. reversing from minor road onto main road	1	3	€60	€90
Driving on a footpath	1	3	€60	€90
Driving on a cycle track	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to turn left when entering a roundabout	1	3	€60	€90
Driving on a median strip, e.g. boundary between two carriageways	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to stop for school warden sign	1	4	€80	€120

Failure to stop when so required by a member of the Garda Siochana	2	5	€80	€120
Failure to leave appropriate distance between you and the vehicle in front	2	4	€80	€120
Failure to yield	2	4	€80	€120
Driving without reasonable consideration	2	4	€80	€120
Failure to comply with mandatory traffic signs at junctions	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to comply with prohibitory traffic signs	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to comply with keep left/keep right signs	1	3	€60	€90
Failure to comply with traffic lane markings	1	3	€60	€90
Illegal entry onto a one-way street	1	3	€60	€90
Driving a vehicle when unfit		3	Court Fine	
Parking a vehicle in a dangerous position		5	Court Fine	
Breach of duties at an accident		5	Court Fine	

Offences that currently incur Penalty Points

Offence	Penalty Points on Payment	Penalty Points on Conviction	Fixed Charge	
			Amount paid in 28 days	Amount paid in next 28 days
Speeding (introduced 31 Oct 2002)	2	4	€80	€120
Driving without Insurance (introduced 1 June 2003)		5	Court Fine	
Failure by Driver to comply with front seat belt requirements	2	4	€60	€90
Failure by Driver to comply with rear seat belt requirements for passengers (introduced 25 August 2003)	2	4	€60	€90
Driver found to be driving carelessly (introduced 4 June 2004)		5	Court Fine	