

Barricade the water hazards

Mandatory guardrails in high-risk areas can save lives, say experts

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PETALING JAYA: Roads that run alongside bodies of water like rivers or ponds must be properly barricaded with guardrails to prevent tragedies.

Such crash barriers can prevent tragedies like the one in Kedah on Saturday, which claimed the lives of a family of six, said road safety expert Datuk Suret Singh.

The Road Safety Council of Malaysia executive council member said the relevant authorities should make it a mandatory road design requirement to have guardrails at locations where vehicles can careen off into water bodies or ravines.

"This would protect a vehicle that may skid off the road from plunging into a lake or river.

"There should also be adequate

street lighting along roads that pose such a hazard," he said.

Other factors that could contribute to such accidents include speeding, worn tyres, faulty brakes and defective steering systems, the former Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research chairman said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road Safety Research Centre head Assoc Prof Dr Law Teik Hua said among factors that could lead to motorists losing control of their vehicle are distractions during driving, such as using a cellphone or failing to take note of changing road conditions – like a surface becoming wet and slippery after or during a downpour.

"Motorists should also stay updated with weather reports and flood warnings, especially in monsoon-prone or coastal regions.

"Streams of water flowing over

a road surface, even when it is shallow, may indicate rising water levels.

"It is safer to turn back and wait it out until the weather improves.

"During such seasons, night driving should also be avoided, as it is difficult to judge the depth of water and hidden potholes in darkness," he told *The Star*.

Law said being overly confident of a vehicle's capability could also lead to fatal consequences, as no vehicle is floodproof.

"Lighter, compact vehicles like sedans and compact cars are more vulnerable to buoyancy or being swept away compared to heavier trucks.

"However, no motor vehicle, SUV or four-wheel drive is floodproof because even large vehicles can be caught in deep and moving waters and leave their occupants stranded.

"A mere six to 12 inches of water will float a car. Two feet of deep water will sweep away nearly all vehicles.

"Fast-moving water also exerts incredible pressure. At 12 inches high, it can toss a half-tonne vehicle around.

"Water also covers up or hides hazards like obstructions, open manholes or washed-out roadbeds," he said.

Law also said there are also dangerous myths of escaping submerged vehicles, such as claims that one should "wait until the car fills with water to open the door".

He said such a move meant wasting time, adding that those trapped should initiate an escape as quickly as possible.

"Headrests stems are also touted to be capable of breaking side windows, but most headrests in

modern vehicles lack the sharp metal spikes needed to shatter glass. It is best to use a special emergency window-breaking tool, which every motorist should carry in their vehicle," he said.

On Monday, a couple and their four children, aged between six months and nine years, were found dead in their submerged car in Sungai Korok, Kedah.

The victims were returning to Jerlun on Saturday after visiting relatives but became unreachable.

A search was mounted and the car was found in the river.

The victims, Muhammad Azim Izat Ishak, 32, and his wife, Nurul Hidayah Khadijah Razman Efendi, 31; Putra Rayyan Nur Izat, 9; Eve Adriana, 8; Anayla Huma'ira, 7; and Tuah Haidar, six months old, were found lifeless and huddled in the back seat of their car.