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# Oxford Word of the Month – July: deso

**noun:** a person who abstains from alcohol at a social gathering so as to be fit to drive others home; a designated driver.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In 2012 the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) in Victoria ran a competition, *Make A Film, Make A Difference*, which asked people aged 25 or under to come up with an idea for a short film on the theme ‘Your mate’s life is in your hands’. The winners of the competition were given a \$25,000 budget to produce their film. One of the winners produced a music video with the title *The Deso*. In this short film the protagonist sings a rap song with the refrain ‘I’m the **deso, deso**, and I’m rockin’ super clean, so show me some love, I’m takin’ one for the team’. He sings of the benefits of being the designated driver: being in control, looking after your mates, and having a good time without getting drunk. The film was subsequently used by the TAC to promote a safe drinking culture for young Victorians, with the primary message of discouraging drink-driving.

**Deso** (pronounced **dezz**-oh) is an abbreviation of *designated driver*: a person who abstains from alcohol at a social gathering so as to be fit to drive others home. The word includes the suffix -o which is frequently added to Australian abbreviations as a marker of a shared informality. Other examples include *ambo* (ambulance driver), *arvo* (afternoon), *compo* (compensation), and *rello* (a relative).

There is evidence for **deso** on the Internet from at least 2010, and it appears in Australian newspapers from 2012. Use of the term has increased recently with the implementation of various education programs and government initiatives. These encourage the practice of designating one person from a group of friends to be the driver responsible for taking the others to and from a social event, and to abstain from drinking alcohol on that occasion. Some commercial venues actively participate in these initiatives:

*At a few places, if you tell them you’re a ‘deso’, they’ll give you a free Coke, but at other places, they will make you pay for it. (Ballarat Courier, 18 July 2012).*

The same article suggests that some people take advantage of the initiative:

*You hear of people who are as blind as a bat who go up to the bar and say ‘I’m*

*deso tonight' and walk away with a free drink.*

These quotations reveal that, while **deso** is a relatively new addition to the Australian lexicon, it has already become widely recognised in some parts of the community.

**Deso** will be considered for future inclusion in the *Australian National Dictionary* and our Australian Oxford dictionaries.

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