**Remarks Prepared For**
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**Promoting Change for Improved Road Safety**

**Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA)**
**Legislative and Public Policy Summit**
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- Thank you, Chris, for the introduction and the invitation to be here.

- I'm pleased to speak about steps the Administration is taking to protect the lives of citizens on the nation's roads.

- As your Association celebrates its 100th anniversary, it is fitting that you not only celebrate past accomplishments but also look toward shaping the future through technological innovation.

- Those innovations offer great potential to make America's roads safer.

- Safety is the Administration's top transportation priority.

- Americans are traveling more and more miles each year.

- Exposure is increasing by every measure.

- But over the long haul, the fatality rate per 100 million VMT has been dropping.

- In 2003 the rate was 1.50 per 100M VMT.

- Even though the rate is down, there were still more than 43,000 people killed on our roads in 2003.

- Traffic crashes are responsible for 95% of transportation related deaths and 99% of transportation related injuries.

- Crashes are the leading cause of death for children and adults to age 34.

- They are the 3rd leading cause of years of potential life lost for all ages, just behind cancer and heart disease.

- In addition to the human costs, in economic costs, we lose more than $230 billion total each year.

- These costs include more than $32 billion in medical treatment costs, $51 billion for impaired driving, and $20 billion due to people who refuse to use safety belts.

- Crashes not only affect the health of our communities nationwide, but they also affect you as employers.

- Protecting workers from motor vehicle crash injury makes good business sense.

- A new NHTSA report using data from 1998-2000 shows that motor vehicle crash injuries cost employers nearly $60 billion annually in lost productivity, medical costs, and health insurance increases.

- Of that total, motor vehicle crashes imposed a $16.3 billion health-related fringe benefit bill for employers.

- And, $8.6 billion was spent on life insurance, disability insurance and sick leave for crash victims.

- Two-thirds of the expected lives that can be saved on the highways will come from improvements in 2 areas: increased safety belt use and reductions in impaired driving.

- So it is obvious where our human factor priorities should be.

- Safety belts would make a huge difference in saving lives in impaired driving crashes, among the risk-taking population.

- With respect to vehicle safety priorities, there are data that stand out.

- Rollovers account for around 2½ % of crashes, but 1/3 of occupant fatalities.

- The data show that ejection is a leading cause of death in rollover.

- Once again, safety belt use makes a huge difference if a vehicle rolls over.

- Belts are 80% effective in preventing fatalities during rollovers.

- Improving inter-vehicle compatibility is increasingly important given changes in the composition of the national vehicle fleet.

- SUVs now account for 50% of all new vehicle sales.

- It is clear why these are among NHTSA's top Highway Safety Priorities.

- National safety belt use rate stands at an all-time high of 79%.

- Of the 33,000 people killed as occupants in vehicle crashes last year, 6 out of 10 were unbelted.

- About half of those unbelted people, or about **9,000** individuals, would be alive today if only they had buckled up.

- There are 2 types of safety belt laws, primary and secondary. *[Explain.]*

- Safety belt use is about 11 percentage points higher in primary law states.

- We have 20 states in this country that have primary laws. An additional 29 states have secondary laws. New Hampshire has no adult belt use law.

- A 1% increase in national safety belt use results in 2.8 million new belt users, more than 270 additional lives saved; and reduced severity of more than 4,000 injuries in the moderate to critical range.

- Let me put this into perspective.

- Our last 5 major rulemakings combined – that's LATCH, advanced air bags, tire pressure monitoring systems, tire standards and fuel system integrity - will save a total of roughly 350 lives per year.

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|---|---|
| • **Child Restraints** | **36 - 50 lives** |
| • **Advanced Air Bags (#208)** | **117 – 215 lives** |
| • **TPMS (#138)** | **124 lives** |
| • **Tire Upgrade (#139)** | **1 – 4 lives** |
| • **Fuel Tank Integrity (#301)** | **8 – 21 lives** |
| • **TOTAL** | **286 – 414/year** |

- In some cases we won't see those benefits for years, even decades.

- By contrast, **if every state adopted a primary safety belt law, we would save at least 1,400 lives per year**. And that is a benefit that could start **RIGHT NOW**.

- Last year, about 17,400 people were killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes.

- Nearly 15,000 of these were in crashes where the driver's BAC was $\geq$.08

- This is not just a "social indiscretion." These are people who are drinking to get drunk.

- They have medical problems that need to be addressed.

- Our focus on safety belts and impaired driving reflects one part of the comprehensive approach we take to promote traffic safety.

- *[Briefly discuss Haddon Matrix.]*

- Historically, we focused time and attention primarily on improving the crashworthiness of our vehicles through advances in technologies.

- Many of the companies you represent have been in the forefront of delivering those technologies to vehicle manufacturers.

- But now we need to refocus our efforts and technologies on ways to enhance crash avoidance.

- Currently about 90% of crashes are due to factors that are driver-related, including both driver task errors and driver impairments.

- Seventy-six percent of crashes are due to driver task errors and 14% are due to physiological impairments, thus a total of 90% of the errors come from driver related factors.

- Vehicle defects contribute perhaps 3% to crash causation.

- Clearly, new initiatives in driver assistance technologies hold the greatest promise of life-saving benefits in the future.

- Tremendous progress has been made in the area of injury mitigation / crashworthiness.

- Our efforts over the years have paid off with a steady level of improvement in vehicle crashworthiness during the past 10 years.

- We have seen improvement even as speed has increased and vehicle characteristics (such as weight, geometry, stiffness) have changed.

- But now there is a dramatic increase in the number and types of advanced technologies that can help drivers avoid crashes.

- These new technologies will provide additional ways to address behavioral issues such as drinking and driving and failure to wear safety belts.

- These technologies will help expand the potential for crash prevention through driver warning and driver assistance products, and possibly driver intervention.

- The vision for tomorrow's vehicles recognizes the critical role that emerging technologies will play in creating a system for total safety.

- These technologies offer the potential to pick up where human behavior leaves off, in many cases overriding bad judgment or by providing assistance to correct errors that people make.

- But these technologies are evolving so fast that it will take government and industry working together to keep up with the pace.

- Our goal is to hasten into the marketplace the introduction of appropriate vehicle-based technologies that could achieve a safety benefit.

- But in doing so we recognize that these technologies present unique research challenges in human factors engineering.

- Throughout NHTSA's history our approach has been to define the safety problem, develop countermeasures, evaluate the benefits of those measures, then establish performance requirements.

- We are moving into a new era. Much of the gains from crashworthiness measures have already been achieved. With the availability of new technologies, the focus now must shift to avoiding the crash.

- The new approach will identify promising new technologies. As always, we will evaluate the benefits and then promote consumer information as an effective means to enhance safety.

- As manufacturers, you need to assess both the safety potential of the new technologies as well as assess any unintended consequences.

- The deployment strategy requires collaboration between the government and those who are experts in the new technologies.

- It also offers a great opportunity to go far beyond regulatory actions by enhancing consumer information.

- Consumers use safety information in making their vehicle purchasing decisions. A well-informed public is a great catalyst for improved safety.

- Our new web site - safercar.gov - will enhance ease of use and accessibility to this valuable consumer information.

- Consumer information programs are far more effective than promoting regulatory actions to solve the remaining safety problems.

- Although we continue to address crashworthiness and safety belt use in rollovers, we intend to continue a push toward rollover avoidance.

- NHTSA is investigating a number of systems designed to reduce rollover occurrences. These include designs for handling and stability characteristics, electronic stability control, and road departure warning systems.

- Single vehicle road departure crashes account for nearly 900,000 crashes per year. Almost 12,000 of these are fatal crashes. A primary goal should therefore be to keep all 4 wheels on the pavement.

- We believe that Electronic Stability Control technology shows great promise. But we estimate that those equipped with ESC represent only about 5-10% of today's new passenger vehicle sales.

- There are multiple types of ESC systems on the market today – mainly in the higher end vehicles. Eventually we will need performance specifications to address what is and what is not ESC.

- We have added a dynamic test this year to stimulate improvements in vehicle rollover resistance.

- Our last priority area is to improve inter-vehicle compatibility.

- We will be announcing the start of a new rulemaking next week that will upgrade our current side impact protection.

- Even our best efforts to improve side impact protection can be misunderstood.

- The fact is, we never specify the steps a manufacturer must take to meet the standard. That is left to the manufacturer to develop.

- We would not want to stifle creativity by mandating a particular technology. In this country manufacturers choose how they will meet the requirements of a standard.

- Our goal continues to be the creation of the highest level of safety in the world.

- The Act of Congress that created NHTSA in 1966 provided general requirements that the Secretary establish Federal motor vehicle safety standards that are practicable and objective.

- The statute went on to say that the public should be protected against unreasonable risk of accidents occurring as a result of the design, construction or performance of motor vehicles.

- That is our current authority. We strive to meet that standard every day in everything we do.

- Beyond that, additional authority for advanced crash avoidance initiatives is now pending before Congress.

- This bill expands our existing authority to pursue crash avoidance technologies.

- This would include evaluations of crash avoidance technologies such as ESC, Telematics, Vision enhancement systems, and other collision avoidance systems.

- Meanwhile we continue to operate under our current authority.

- Unless specifically directed to do so by Congress, this Administration will not limit the creativity of manufacturers and suppliers by mandating any specific technology.

- Our emphasis has been and will continue to be on establishing performance standards.

- Your companies will continue to play a major role in increasing road safety.

- You have the expertise and pioneering tradition and, along with vehicle manufacturers and the government, can help deliver innovations that will lead to these advanced safety systems.

- Meanwhile, as employers and good corporate partners in your communities you also can undertake some more immediate actions to promote road safety.

- First, promote primary safety belt laws in your states.

- As employers you can support policies in your states that affect the well-being of your workers.

- Make sure that there are written protocols for your own employees to use safety belts when driving on the job.

- Experience indicates that workplace behavior transfers to employee's personal lives as well, and you will see the savings in your insurance and health care expenditures.

- Further, actively support and encourage vigorous enforcement of highway safety laws, especially for safety belt use and against impaired driving.

- Beyond these actions, however, I urge you to think creatively in terms of new technologies that will further improve crash avoidance and road safety.

- In the collaborative framework for the future that I just outlined, much will depend on your innovation and initiative in crash avoidance.

- No one should be misled into thinking that traffic injury and death are inevitable consequences of living in a motorized society.

- The deaths on our roads are largely preventable.

- About 3 weeks ago Secretary Mineta was addressing a Special Session of the United Nations in observance of World Health Day.

- At that time he said, "Mortality should not be the consequence of mobility."

- This Administration will not become complacent with more than 43,000 people killed each year.

- Those of us in this room today have the power to do something about this now and into the future. Thank you.

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