

**Remarks as prepared for  
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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**For the Rubber Manufacturer's Association  
and General Products Group (RMA/GPG)**

**Monday, March 1, 2004**

Thank Don Shea [**RMA President**] for the introduction.

- On behalf of President Bush and Secretary of Transportation Norm Mineta, I am pleased to be here today to talk about safety—our #1 transportation priority.
- **Acknowledge tire companies for their work with NHTSA to help us understand more about tires.**
- **This was important in upgrading tire standards under TREAD.**
- Americans continue to travel more miles each year.
- The traffic fatality rate has dropped dramatically since the mid-60s.
  - By 2002, the rate was 1.5 deaths per 100M VMT.
  - Nevertheless, nearly 43,000 people were killed and almost 3 million more injured on our roads in 2002.
- Traffic crashes account for 95% of all transportation-related deaths and 99% of transportation-related injuries.
- Crashes are the leading cause of death for age groups from 4 to 34.
- Traffic crashes cost \$230 billion annually, including:
  - More than \$32 billion in medical costs;
  - \$51 billion for impaired driving; and
  - \$20 billion for people who refuse to wear safety belts.
- According to a new NHTSA analysis covering the period from 1998 – 2000, MV crashes both on and off the job cost employers nearly \$60 billion annually.
  - Crashes are also the leading cause of workplace fatalities.
  - Failure to use safety belts, by both employees and their dependents, is a contributor to these losses.
  - Implementing an active traffic safety program at work is one of the best ways to protect employees and their families, and to control these costs.
  - I urge you to look at your role in promoting traffic safety not simply as tire manufacturers, but also as major employers and leaders in your states.

- The Bush Administration is determined to take the necessary action to cut the fatality rate by 2008 to not more than 1 death per 100 million VMT.
- The goal is challenging, but we have proven strategies to help us achieve that goal.
- Most of the lives to be saved would come from increasing safety belt use and reducing impaired driving.
- The data set our priorities.
  - Increase safety belt use
  - Reduce impaired driving
  - Reduce rollovers
  - Improve our data collection and analysis
  - Improve vehicle compatibility
- National belt use rate is now 79% -- an all-time high.
- Of the nearly 33,000 people killed as occupants in vehicle crashes in 2002, 59% were unbelted.
  - About half of those unbelted people would be alive today if only they had buckled up.
  - Last year, safety belt use saved about \$58 billion in reduced emergency response costs, medical care and related expenses.
  - Conversely, failure to use safety belts resulted in:
    - 7,200 fatalities
    - 98,000 serious injuries

**[Describe differences between primary and secondary laws]**

- I was pleased by RMA's mid-February decision to throw the weight of the Association behind enactment of a primary belt law in Ohio.
- I am asking the RMA and its members to use their considerable resources to support this law in the states that don't yet have a primary law.
- There is tremendous variation in the overall motor vehicle fatality rates in those states where RMA member headquarters are located.
- 20 states have primary laws
  - 29 states have secondary laws
  - New Hampshire has no adult belt use law.
  - Every 1% increase in national safety belt use results in
    - 2.8 million new belt users;
    - More than 270 additional lives saved;
    - Reduced severity of more than 4,000 moderate to critical injuries

- We made great progress in reducing alcohol related fatalities through the mid-90's, then it leveled off.
- In 2002 there were 17,419 alcohol-related fatalities.
- Of these, more than 15,000 were at .08 and above, the legal limit in most states.
- The problem varies greatly by state.
- We intend to reach the national goal of not more than 0.53 alcohol related fatalities per 100M VMT by the end of 2004.
- SAFETEA – our safety decisions are based on data.
- Data enable us to develop interventions and monitor our progress.
- Data are what we used to craft SAFETEA, the highway reauthorization bill now before Congress.
- SAFETEA contains more than twice the safety funding of its predecessor.
- It contains both performance grants and incentive grants for states not only for improved data collection but also for enactment of primary belt laws and more aggressive crackdowns on impaired drivers.
- At its core, the bill is **flexible** – **the F in SAFETEA** – allowing states to use the funds to address their own priority areas.
- And states will be held **accountable** – **the A in SAFETEA** – for their results.
- Congress needs to pass a responsible bill as soon as possible.
- We can no longer delay providing states the resources they need to reduce highway deaths.
- Rollovers: There are 6 areas where we can focus our efforts to achieve a reduction in fatalities from rollover collisions.
  - Ejection mitigation
  - Dynamic rollover testing
  - Handling and stability
  - Electronic stability control
  - Road departure warning systems
  - Raise awareness of NCAP

**[Discuss steering and handling in rollover testing.]**

**[Discuss impact of tires "ploughing out" on rollover testing.]**

- *The “ Steering Machine”*
  - Used in testing, this makes driving maneuvers repeatable; maintains fixed steering rate;
  - It removes driver variability;
  - It programmable so that a variety of desired steering inputs are possible;
  - It can be triggered by feedback during the maneuver for precise timing of inputs.
  
- Many of our approaches take advantage of new and emerging safety technologies, but safety belt use—a very low-tech solution—is a major contributor to surviving rollovers.
  
- The incompatibility of many light trucks with passenger cars is a growing problem.
  
- There are improvements that can be made in vehicle design that will help mitigate the effects of size differences.
  
- TREAD: NHTSA has completed 20 of 21 TREAD legislative mandates.
  - On the final item, TPMS, we did it right the first time and now we’re doing it right again.
  - We expect to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on TPMS by late summer.
  
  - In addition to the TREAD rulemakings, NHTSA is drafting responses to RMA petitions regarding the tire labeling final rule and tire reserve load capacity.
  
  - As important as tire safety is, we must remember that the appropriate use of other safety equipment in the vehicle has an enormous impact on the safety value of your products.
  
  - Case in point: several years ago there was a great deal of publicity about a NHTSA investigation and subsequent tire recall.
  
  - But few realize that **had safety belt use been higher among those individuals involved in the hundreds of crashes and numerous fatalities at that time, this country would have seen a very different outcome.**
  
  - Approximately 60% of those killed in these rollovers were unbelted.

- Safety belts are approximately 80% effective in preventing fatalities from rollovers.
- This means that the vast majority of those unbelted people killed in these rollovers would be alive today if only they had buckled up.
- We need to get national safety belt use up to about 90%, on a par with other industrialized nations.
- At NHTSA we have deep appreciation for one of the most important piece of safety equipment on a vehicle—the tires.
- NHTSA has a variety of activities underway to ensure tire safety – activities directed at both consumers and manufacturers. Among them:
  - Published Tire Safety brochure
  - Released ratings for tires used on most of the nation’s passenger vehicles to help consumers with tire selection and good maintenance
  - Updating and improving the current light vehicle tire performance requirements for durability and tire labeling
  - Developing a new standard for tire pressure monitoring systems for light vehicles
- We also are interested in the issue of tire aging.
  - Some of the companies here today have helped us define tire aging, but we need additional research on the issue
    - Your organizations can play an important role in that effort.
    - You can do that by continuing to conduct and share your independent research
- The public needs to better understand the importance of caring for a key item of safety equipment – the item that the companies represented at this meeting manufacture.
  - The public does not yet understand what is needed to maintain tires.
  - That is apparent from recent survey findings.
  - 27% of passenger cars had underinflated tires as follows:
    - 1 tire: 14%
    - 2 tires: 7%
    - 3 tires: 3%
    - 4 tires: 3%

- The problem is a little worse for LTVs.
  - 32% of light trucks had underinflated tires as follows:
    - 1 tire: 13%
    - 2 tires: 10%
    - 3 tires: 4%
    - 4 tires : 6%
- The same survey gave us additional findings.
  - 67% of drivers check their tire pressure less than once per month.
  - Only 25% of drivers refer to the owner's manual or tire placard for tire instructions.
- Overloading and/or under-inflated tires are the leading causes of tire failures every year.
- The public needs education about when to purchase new tires.
  - We know this because about 9% of passenger cars and light trucks have at least one tire with 2/32" of tread depth or less
  - Problem is compounded because these minimal tread depth tires are from 1.5 to 1.8 times more likely to be under-inflated as tires with deeper tread.
  - The bottom line: not enough drivers check their tires regularly.
  - This is true even for drivers who believe they are conscientious about vehicle maintenance, people who change their oil every 3,000 miles.

**[Tell Don Beyer Volvo anecdote here.]**

- Summary: I'm asking for your help in 4 ways to promote traffic safety.
  - First, I am asking the RMA to help promote adoption and enforcement of primary safety belt laws in all states. This will help bring national safety belt use to 90%, on a par with other industrialized nations.
  - Second, we need to work together to deliver more effective consumer information and education on tire safety in the areas of:
    - Tire maintenance
    - Tire inflation pressure levels
    - Use of new tire safety information labeling
  - Third, let Congress know your stand on the highway reauthorization bill – SAFETEA – that is now pending before Congress.

- Finally, I urge all manufacturers to become leaders in implementing corporate policies that promote traffic safety – actions that can improve your bottom line.
- No one should assume that the death and mayhem on our roads today is the natural consequence of living in a high-tech, motorized society.
- Most of the nearly 43,000 deaths that occurred last year were preventable.
- With your help, we can save thousands of American lives.
- With your help, we will do better.
- Thank you.