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- **Thanks, Georgia**, for the introduction.
- **Acknowledge LHSC** for their leadership and support.
- **Acknowledge Todd Thoma** [NHTSA Medical Fellow] who will be attending and presenting at this conference.

- Safety is our #1 transportation priority.
- Transportation is especially important to the President's efforts to keep the economy moving. Making sure that people arrive safely is important.

- Our emphasis must be on safety since nearly 43,000 people were killed in highway crashes in 2002.

- The traffic fatality rate has dropped dramatically since the mid-60s.
- Even while the rate declined exposure increases have kept the number of deaths high.
- These exposure increases include growth in the number of:
 - registered vehicles
 - vehicle miles traveled, and
 - licensed drivers.
- All of these increased 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.

- Our current rate is 1.50 fatalities per 100 million VMT
- Our goal is to cut the fatality rate to not more than 1 death per 100 million VMT by 2008.

- This is an ambitious goal and it will take a concerted effort across all areas to reach it.
- 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
- Today I want to talk with you about just those areas where you can have the greatest impact:
 - increasing safety belt use,
 - reducing impaired driving, and
 - improving data.
- National belt use rate is now 79% - an all-time high.
- In Louisiana safety belt use rose from 68.6% in 2002 to 73.8% in 2003.
- Congratulations. Great work in just a single year.
- But more remains to be done.
- Safety belts are about 50% effective overall in saving lives from crashes, yet many people still refuse to buckle up.
- Of the nearly 33,000 people killed as occupants in vehicle crashes in 2002, 59% were unbelted.
- The real tragedy: 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 and 98,000 serious injuries.
- Some of those injured and killed are children. In Louisiana currently, only **children under 13** are required to wear safety belts in the rear seating position.
- I urge you to call on your legislators to strengthen the safety belt law to increase the age requirement for children riding in the back seat.
- They will respect your experience. Your voice carries a lot of weight.
- 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.
- 20 states have a primary safety belt law, including Louisiana.
- 29 states have secondary laws
- New Hampshire has no adult belt use law.
- While every state needs a primary safety belt law, we also need to ensure that the primary laws are vigorously and consistently enforced.
- **Pick up trucks** present a special problem locally.
- In 2003, the belt use rate for all vehicles in the Region VI States was 80%.
- In contrast safety belt use among pick up drivers is considerably lower than for drivers of other types of vehicles.
- During 2003 in your state there was more than a 6-percentage point difference. All vehicles combined had a nearly 74% use rate while pickup trucks had a 67% use rate.
- Comparing Louisiana to your neighbor, Texas, we find additional differences in belt use among pick up drivers.
- In 2002 in Louisiana 79% of the pick up truck deaths were unbelted compared to 62% of these deaths in Texas.
- A new grant funded project is starting in the Region VI states to increase safety belt use of pickup truck drivers and occupants.
- This **Pickup Truck Demonstration Project** will provide funding for a focused message campaign devoted to pickup truck drivers and occupants prior to the May *Click-It or Ticket* enforcement Mobilization.
- The *Click It or Ticket* approach has worked to get belt use up everywhere it has been implemented.
- The states' experience with this approach has varied greatly depending on whether they implemented the entire CIOT model or just part of it.
- Those states following all components, including paid/earned media and vigorous enforcement, showed a 9 percentage point increase.
- Those following only portions of the model posted a more modest 3 percentage point gain.
- The control states showed no real change.
- By comparison, your neighbor state of Texas adopted the full CIOT model, then saw their belt use sharply increase.
- To make even more gains and move beyond the current belt use rate in Louisiana I want to encourage you to **adopt all components of the proven Click It or Ticket model.**

- For some types of vehicles is already approaching, or even surpassing, the national fatality goal.
- The safety gains for occupants of these vehicles are directly related to increases in safety belt use and improved vehicle designs.
- **Motorcycles are the notable exception.**
- On a national basis the number of fatalities among motorcycle riders has increased just over 50% during the last 6 years.
- Only about half of these fatally injured riders were helmeted at the time of their crash.
- During this period 6 states repealed their helmet laws: TX, AR, KT, FL, PA, LA.
- There is more to the problem than simply repeal of helmet laws.
- A majority of motorcycle fatalities occur on rural, undivided roads.
- Alcohol involvement and speed continue to be contributing factors.

- Louisiana repealed its mandatory helmet law in 1998.
- Fatalities rose significantly in Louisiana and Kentucky following the repeal of these laws in these 2 states.
- In fact, during the 6 year period shown in the slide above where motorcycle fatalities rose nationally just over 50%, in Louisiana fatalities increased by 230%
- In the 2-year period prior to the repeal of the helmet law the fatality rate averaged about 4.5 per 100,000 registered motorcycles.
- This increased to 7.9 in the year following the law's repeal.
- The experiences of Louisiana and Kentucky, as outlined in this report, are similar to what occurred in Arkansas and Texas when these states repealed their helmet laws in 1997.
- These experiences leave little doubt about the negative safety consequences of helmet law repeals.

- Moving to the problem with impaired driving: the nation made great progress through the mid-90's, then it leveled off.
- Last year, more than 17,400 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes.
- The median BAC for impaired drivers in fatal crashes is 0.16—twice the legal limit in most states.
- When last measured in 2002, alcohol-related traffic fatalities occurred at the rate of 0.61 per 100 million VMT.

- We intend to cut that rate to not more than 0.53 alcohol-related traffic fatalities by the end of this year.

- In Louisiana the alcohol related fatality rate is nearly 4 times as high as the national goal for this year.
- Louisiana: you have a lot of work ahead of you.

- We are committed to providing additional resources to shore up impaired driving efforts in those states that have the highest numbers or rates of death.
- These fiscal year 04 resources are targeted to training, equipment and related DWI enforcement efforts.
- Louisiana is one of the states designed to receive these additional funds.
- Further, under the Administration's reauthorization bill, another \$50 million is slated for states with the most severe impaired driving problems.

- We have used the success of CIOT as a model for achieving another of our goals: reducing impaired driving.
- To help achieve this goal, NHTSA is implementing a focused **three-prong strategy**.
 - The first strategy is **high visibility enforcement**.
 - The presence of officers on the road - backed up with media support - makes all the difference.
 - The public must perceive that if you drive impaired you will be caught.

- Another strategy includes **expanding the number of DWI courts** and prosecutor positions, and reviewing ways to increase the conviction rates of DWI offenders.
 - Many prosecutors are new and inexperienced. They "cut their teeth" on DWI cases until they move on to "more serious" crimes.
 - They need training and access to mentors with more DWI case experience.
 - DWI cases are complicated. They both need and deserve experienced prosecutors.
 - Specialized DWI courts are effective in improving case management.
 - They have been successful in many areas, including helping to achieve a reduction in recidivism.
 - We need your support to encourage judges to create more dedicated DWI courts.
 - We understand that **Louisiana now has a special DWI court and that you are moving forward with designating special prosecutors**.
 - **Congratulations** on these steps.
 - You can expect to see rapid reductions in alcohol recidivism as a result.

- A third strategy is **alcohol screening and brief intervention**.
 - This involves the physician or other healthcare provider asking a few questions to determine if the patient has an alcohol problem.
 - Patients who need it are then referred for assessment and possible treatment.

- There is compelling evidence in scientific and medical literature that shows that screening and brief intervention is effective in decreasing alcohol consumption among problem drinkers.
 - My agency is working to ensure that health care providers practice alcohol screening with their patients as a regular part of routine care.
- To give law enforcement officers the tools they need to fight impaired driving, I encourage Louisiana legislators to do 2 things:
 - **Strengthen the Open Container law** to cover all occupants
 - The current state law applies only to the driver.
 - In fiscal year 2003 **Louisiana lost \$7.9 million** for having a non-compliant law.
 - This amount will go up in the future.
 - **Adopt a Repeat Offender law** that meets all 4 Federal criteria.
 - Current Louisiana State Law does not meet any of the 4 Section 164 requirements, including
 - 1-year license suspension for repeat offenders
 - Impoundment or ignition interlocks on offenders vehicles
 - Alcohol assessment for all offenders and treatment as appropriate
 - Mandatory minimum sentences
 - Failure to meet these requirements cost Louisiana another \$7.9 million in fiscal year 2003.
- The final priority I want to talk with you about is improving data.
- I cannot emphasize enough how vital the data systems that you develop and maintain are in reaching our common safety goals.
- Data are critical to establishing safety priorities, developing interventions, and monitoring progress.
- State and local governments use the data you collect and manage.
- But it goes beyond that.
- Much of the national data we come to rely on starts with you and your officers, those of you in the field at the crash scene.
- The impact of what you do extends far beyond your own jurisdictions.
- We committed to helping states shore up their data systems to ensure that we have timely and accurate safety data.
- Data have provided the foundation for the funding increases proposed under the Department of Transportation's reauthorization bill, SAFETEA.
- Data are what helped us 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.
- The Administration’s proposal, SAFETEA, gets this job done without raising taxes or increasing the deficit.
- Secretary of Transportation Norm Mineta and I are looking forward to working with the Congress to pass the bill as soon as possible.

- The key to getting maximum flexibility of funds under SAFETEA is for each state to develop a Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan.
- There are a number of groups that will be at the table when this plan is developed and funding decisions are made.
- Make sure that you are one of them.

- I would be remiss if I left here today without mentioning a couple of new items.
- We have a new, easy-to-use web site that contains consumer safety information.
- This is located at www.safercar.gov
- Some of the information on that site comes from the star rating system on vehicle rollover propensity.

- I have talked about those traffic safety areas that this state must address:
 - Increasing safety belt use
 - Reducing impaired driving
- But the real thing you need, what will make the greatest difference in everything you do, is political permission from the top.
- You work hard. We know that there is no shortage of dedication and devotion to saving lives in this room.
- But you can’t do it alone.
- To be effective all of you, law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, safety advocate, must have support at the highest levels.
- You deserve that support.
- One answer to getting this is data.
- Use it to make your case. That will be your best ally.
- Each of you here at this conference can play a pivotal role in helping advance these efforts.

- If there is anything that we at DOT or NHTSA can do to help you accomplish your mission, please contact our Regional Administrator, Georgia Chakiris.
- Your mission is our mission. Thank you.

