

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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INSTITUTE APPLAUDS NHTSA'S RULEMAKING CHANGE THAT WILL ALLOW ADVANCED HEAD PROTECTION IN SIDE IMPACTS

"The Institute is pleased that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has changed Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 201 to encourage the use of airbags that deploy from vehicles' upper interiors to protect people's heads in side impacts," says Insurance Institute for Highway Safety President Brian O'Neill. "The agency's action advances occupant crash protection because head injuries are a leading cause of death in side impacts."

BMW's are the first cars with this type of airbag, and Volvo will introduce a similar system later this year. Other manufacturers also are developing airbags to protect people's heads in side impacts. "If NHTSA hadn't changed the requirements of FMVSS 201, manufacturers would have been forced to replace these advanced systems with less effective interior padding," O'Neill points out.

The side-into-pole test NHTSA now will allow as an alternative under the federal standard for cars with inflatable head protection systems is extremely demanding. This was demonstrated in pole impact tests at 20 mph conducted last year by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Two BMW 5-series were tested, one with the inflatable Head Protection System and one without. In the test without this system, the crash dummy's thorax was protected by the door-mounted side airbag, but its head struck the pole with more than enough force to kill an occupant in a real crash. The head injury criterion was 4720, more than four times the reference value (1000) that indicates a skull fracture or other serious head injury. In contrast, the test with the Head Protection System was a survivable impact with a head injury criterion of 620.

NHTSA estimates inflatable head protection systems could save about 600 lives in side impacts each year. These systems also will prevent serious injuries during rollovers because the airbags typically stay inflated for several seconds. This is long enough to protect occupants when vehicles roll over.

**End of one-page release on NHTSA rulemaking change.
Related information is available on the Institute website.**