

NHTSA WRITES WEAKENED INTERIM RULE

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has served notice that it will issue a three-option interim occupant crash protection standard that materially alters — and in some cases lessens — the level of required protection it proposed as an interim standard about four months ago.

The interim rule is to be effective on cars manufactured from Jan. 1, 1972, to the effective date of the final passive restraint rule it has already adopted. That final rule is to be effective July 1, 1973, but auto makers have asked the safety administration to reconsider that date and other provisions of the rule. As of press time the safety administration had not yet announced a decision on the auto makers' petition, but said that it "is expected to be issued soon."

The safety administration released details of the interim rule in an "advance public information" notice and said that they "represent final decisions with respect to the (interim) standard which is presently being prepared for issuance in the near future."

Inside

- Volpe Aims A Shot At Liquor
'Safe Driving' Ads . . . page 3
- California Study Finds Public
Hazy on DWI Levels . . . page 4
- Five States Join Bumper Bill
Bandwagon . . . page 5
- DOT Forms YOUTHS for Crusade
of 'New Ideas' . . . page 6
- Nader Slices at Lemons And
Scolds Ford . . . page 7

The standard, which offers auto makers three options, stems from an NHTSA proposal announced in September 1970. (See Status Report, Vol. 5, No. 18, Oct. 15, 1970.)

The first option, believed least likely to be adopted by auto makers, is to install passive occupant restraints immediately rather than waiting for the 1973 effective date of the final rule. The second would have auto makers install push-button lap belts at each seating position with automatic-locking or emergency-locking retractors on belts at each outboard seat, front and rear. The third option requires lap and shoulder harnesses in front seats and lap

belts at other seats, with the same requirements for retractors and push-button operability as in the second option.

Both the second and third options require visual and audible warning systems to operate when front seats are occupied, the ignition is "on" and the transmission gear selector is in any forward or reverse drive position but belts are not fastened.

As earlier proposed, the second option would have also required that auto makers meet more stringent requirements for interior padding and energy-absorbing steering columns earlier than those requirements are otherwise due to go into effect. Those requirements have been dropped from the interim rule.

All three options require that criteria be met in 30 mile per hour crash tests. Options Two and Three specify only front-into-barrier tests at that speed, as originally proposed. The first option (for a fully passive system) extends the tests also to 30 mile per hour crashes at angles up to 30 degrees from perpendicular on either side, and to lateral and rollover crashes — tests not included in the September interim proposal.

No injury criteria are included in the third option. (Nor were any included in Option Three of the September proposal.) As in the September proposal, injury criteria set forth in both Options One and Two are the same — but they represent departures from the earlier proposal.

As proposed, the rule would have set limits on the amount of "g" forces an occupant's head could experience in a crash, and set limits on the duration of maximum "g" forces experienced. The rule, by defining head injury criteria in terms of the "Severity Index" developed by General Motors and subsequently adopted by the Society of Automotive Engineers, now materially relaxes these ceilings by allowing instead a wide variation in "g" forces to be experienced — extremely high "g" force levels for very brief durations or lower forces for longer durations. (The Severity Index level set by the safety administration's rule is 1,000.)

Reputable investigators of crash damage to occupants have expressed concern about the validity of the GM index in short duration, high "g" level impacts, particularly in real world crashes, in which high force levels may be concentrated rather

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than ideally distributed over the entire surface of the head — analogous to the difference between being struck with the flat blade of a knife or its point.

Richard G. Snyder, of the University of Michigan's Highway Safety Research Institute, writing in a paper published in the 1970 International Automobile Safety Conference Compendium, cautioned that, "while the upper limit for survival is estimated to be the number 1,000 (on the Severity Index), moderate injury may occur at 700, and to design for the highest survival limit may well exceed a lethal dose statistically.

"These (Severity Index) numbers only measure force-time tolerance and assume that no pressure-induced localized crushing or penetration of the brain has taken place.

"In actual practice a serious injury could occur due to pressure concentration even though the Severity Index value is very low."

The safety administration does not use the Severity Index to define criteria for chest and upper leg forces in the interim rule. The latter it leaves at the same level as proposed in September (itself a reduction from an earlier May 1970 proposal). However, it sets a maximum level of 60 "g's" of force to be experienced by an occupant's chest, a higher ceiling than the 40 "g" maximum that would have been allowed under the September proposal.

VOLPE TAKES A SHOT AT LBI

Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe has warned the Licensed Beverage Industry, Inc., that its widely publicized attempts to define safe levels of drinking before driving may have misled the public, "with some very serious consequences."

Addressing the LBI in New York, Sec. Volpe told representatives of the liquor industry that charts appearing in full-page LBI advertisements in Time and Newsweek magazines, while purporting to indicate "the legal drinking limits for safe driving," ignore the fact that "the legal drinking limit is a far cry from the safe drinking (and driving) limit." He said the misinformation apparently is being widely used since "I understand that nearly 60,000 people requested copies of that chart."

"The man who thinks he can safely drive with a blood alcohol content of up to 0.10 per cent is the man who will jump a median strip to hit your car," Volpe warned.

The chart, which the LBI claims will help "social drinkers to know their limits," purports to show how much alcohol an individual of a given weight may drink over a given period of time before he is "presumed by law to be impaired." It is based on the 0.10 per cent blood alcohol content floor now employed in "presumptive limit" drunk driving laws in many states. Under DOT's highway safety standard program, in order to qualify for federal highway safety funds states are supposed to have laws "making it either unlawful, or presumptive evidence of illegality, if the blood-alcohol concentration of a driver equals or exceeds" a limit not higher than 0.10 per cent.

Earlier the LBI advertisements had come under attack from the American Medical Association and the National Safety Council. Initial advertisements said that AMA and NSC agreed with the LBI advertisement, but after the AMA and NSC objected, reference to both organizations was removed. (See Status Report Vol. 5, No. 16, Sept. 15, 1970.) Later ads were reworded to suggest that LBI's position on safe blood alcohol content levels for drivers agreed with DOT's.

The advertisement has also drawn criticism from Julian A. Waller, M. D., of the University of Vermont, a leading researcher in the field of drunk driving, and William N. Plymat, chairman of the board of Preferred Risk Mutual Insurance Company. Both Waller and Plymat have urged the Federal Trade Commission to take action on the advertisements. FTC has responsibility for halting misleading advertising.

The advertisement was also the subject of a highly critical column by nationally syndicated columnist Clark Mollenhoff.

In his address to the LBI, Sec. Volpe quoted from and paraphrased DOT's 1968 "Report to Congress on Alcohol and Highway Safety." He pointed out that "excessive use of alcohol by drivers and pedestrians is involved in half of all highway deaths." The problem of excessive drinking is not limited to persons using the highway, he added. "In 1968 we had 643 general aviation fatalities. In 45 of these, alcohol was the principal cause or a related factor. That's almost 10 per cent . . . ," he said.

CTSF TACKLES ALCOHOL IGNORANCE PROBLEM

The California Traffic Safety Foundation has begun a multi-media educational campaign to inform Californians of the state's "implied consent" and "presumptive limit" laws.

The campaign will consist of a documentary film, radio and television spot announcements, news releases and brochures for distribution by state agencies.

As part of the state funded program, CTSF conducted a survey of California households to determine the level of understanding of the state's "implied consent" and "presumptive limit" laws. The survey revealed widespread misunderstanding of drunk driving laws, CTSF said.

When asked, among other questions, "Which of these (0.05 per cent, 0.10 per cent, 0.15 per cent, 0.20 per cent) is closest to the present limit at which by law you are presumed to be under the influence of alcohol and too drunk to drive," only 23 per cent of those asked responded correctly that the state's "presumptive limit" is 0.10 per cent. Twenty-six per cent of those asked said they didn't know the answer. Another 26 per cent responded that the state's presumptive limit is 0.05 per cent. The remainder responded 0.15, 0.20 per cent or "any level at all."

FIVE MORE STATES GET BETTER-BUMPER BILLS

Five states have joined the list of those whose legislatures are actively considering bills to require improved crashworthiness of cars in low speed collisions.

The addition of Arizona, Missouri, North Carolina, Washington and Wyoming brings to 16 the number in which such legislation has been introduced since the start of the year. (See Status Report, Vol. 6, No. 2, Feb. 1, 1971.)

Two bills have been introduced in Missouri and one in each of the other four states. All are similar to legislation enacted last year in Florida, which requires that cars manufactured after specified dates be sold subject to a manufacturer's warranty that they can withstand five mile per hour and 10 mile per hour barrier crashes, front and rear, without damage. In Florida the effective dates are set at Jan. 1, 1973, and Jan. 1, 1975, respectively. Following are the five states and the effective dates of their proposed five and 10 mile per hour crashworthiness requirements:

	<u>5 MPH</u>	<u>10 MPH</u>
Arizona	Jan. 1, 1973	Jan. 1, 1975
Missouri	Jan. 1, 1973 Jan. 1, 1974	Jan. 1, 1975 Jan. 1, 1976
North Carolina	Jan. 1, 1974	(none)
Washington	Jan. 1, 1974	Jan. 1, 1976
Wyoming	Jan. 1, 1973	Jan. 1, 1974

The second of the Missouri bills would also require that new passenger cars manufactured beginning Jan. 1, 1976, have bumpers "at least five inches wide" with center points not more than 20 inches and not less than 14 inches above ground. It also would require that bumpers "extend across the full width of the vehicle." The Washington bill provides that, effective Jan. 1, 1974, all cars manufactured for sale in the state have front and rear bumpers "a standard 20 inches above the surface of the road."

NTSB STUDIES EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE — Recent earthquake activity in California has revealed the possibility that roads and bridges in the area have not been designed to sufficiently withstand earthquake forces of magnitudes known to occur in the state. Last week's earthquake measured 6.5 on the Richter scale. (The 1906 San Francisco earthquake measured 8.3 — some 100 times more severe.)

Because of extensive damage to the federally design-approved and funded structures, the National Transportation Safety Board has sent an investigator to examine the highway bridges — both those that failed and those that remained standing during the quake. "The adequacy of existing standards . . . will also be reviewed," NTSB Chairman John H. Reed said.

STAPP AWARDED DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL

Col. John P. Stapp has been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his highly respected research in human tolerance to crash forces. Two decades ago Stapp, acting as a human guinea pig, showed that the human body is so rugged that if properly packaged it can sustain without injury forces much higher than those experienced in most highway crashes. His findings have greatly influenced astronaut packaging and are slowly and sporadically being applied in highway loss reduction.

Stapp, an Air Force officer, has been on assignment in a senior capacity with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration since 1967. The award was presented by Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe.

NHSTA ORGANIZES 'YOUTHS' — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has established a 15-member committee, dubbed YOUTHS (Youth Organizations United Toward Highway Safety), to "involve young people in a national crusade for increased highway safety."

Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe said of the new committee, "We don't expect to impose old programs on these young people. We want new blood and new ideas, and we expect them to be a creative and effective force in combating the slaughter on our highways."

The advisory committee will meet periodically throughout the year and culminate its 1971 activities at a national conference October 8-11 in San Francisco. Members include:

Mike Banta, Wickliffe, Ohio, a law student at Case Western Reserve University; Denise Barbieri, New Castle, Delaware, national Secretary of Catholic Youth Organization Teenage Section; Joel Benoliel, Seattle, Washington, third year law student, University of Washington; Santo Ferrarello, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a mechanical engineering student at the University of Florida; Stuart Gold, Chicago, Illinois, a graduate of DePaul University; David McCrabb, Jr., Dayton, Ohio, a graduate of Ohio State School of Transportation; Susan Huskisson, Knoxville, Tennessee, a junior law student at the University of Tennessee; William A. Kirk, Willingboro, New Jersey, a student at Swarthmore College, studying government and political science; Anne Meiselman, Alexandria, Virginia, a pre-medical student at George Mason College, University of Virginia; Allan Peck, Washington, D. C., a senior at Wilson High School; Paul J. Sullivan, Dover, New Hampshire, second year law student at Catholic University; Eugene T. Smith, Washington, D. C., a police officer with the Metropolitan Police Department; Gary Swan, Executive Director, the New York FFA, Leadership Training Foundation, Inc.; Phyllis Swearingen, Durham, North Carolina, sophomore at Duke University, majoring in nursing, and Patrice Yager, Washington, D. C., senior at Cathedral High School.

NADER SLICES LEMONS . . . Ralph Nader and two associates, Lowell Dodge and Ralf Hotchkiss, have compiled an "action manual for lemon owners." The recently published "What To Do With Your Bad Car" deals largely with avenues of redress open to the car buyer who discovers he has purchased a defective vehicle.

Dodge is director of the Center for Auto Safety; Hotchkiss is an engineer affiliated with Students for Consumer Protection, Rockford, Ill.

At a Washington press conference Nader said that publication of the book "reveals a loss of trust in government . . . to remedy consumer and safety complaints."

In the book the authors warn, "You should look behind the assuring advertisements." They cite information showing that a group of 1969 domestic cars tested by Consumers Union had an average of 36 defects per car.

The authors' answer to the problem is the consumer movement. "Billions of consumer dollars are wasted yearly due to ridiculously fragile bumpers and many designs and frauds that jack up repair costs. Doing something about all these outrages is what the consumer movement is all about," Nader says in the book.

The book is published by Grossman Publishers, Inc. It is available in cloth cover (\$8.95) and paperback (\$2.95).

. . . AND SCOLDS FORD. At the press conference Nader also released copies of a letter he has sent to Ford Motor Company Board Chairman Henry Ford II, in which he listed five criticisms of the company, including the fact that "Ford vehicles dominated the lowest ranking (of) automobile brake stopping capability" in the NHSTA's 1971 consumer information compilation.

In the letter Nader chided Ford for apparently backing off on his company's commitment to air bags. He said that in August 1969 the company's engineers were quoted as saying the devices would be introduced on a 1971 model Mercury, but that by December 1970 the company was asking for a delay of the passive restraint rule deadline to 1974, even though, as the company statement said, "We believe in the potential of the air bag system of passive restraint" He noted that Ford was quoted a week later by The New York Times and The Detroit News as calling air bags "a lot of baloney."

STATE UNIT ASSAILS SAFETY SWITCH — A state highway loss reduction organization has accused Congress of cutting "the heart out" of the 1966 National Highway Safety Act with a provision of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1970.

In a recent newsletter Traffic Safety for Michigan, a privately financed educational association, criticized Congress for shifting the responsibility for state highway safety programs from the governor to a designated state agency.

Under the 1966 act each governor was held directly responsible for state safety programs. Governors generally appointed "safety representatives" to handle the programs. But the 1970 act allows a governor to delegate authority for

state safety programs to "a state agency suitably organized and possessed of adequate powers to carry out such programs to the satisfaction" of DOT. This means that governors may designate state highway departments, police agencies or other "suitably organized agencies" to handle the programs. (Some governors have traditionally appointed such agency heads as "safety representatives.")

In the view of TSM, "This cuts the heart out of one of the strongest features of the original law and suggests a victory for federal bureaucrats who prefer to deal directly with state agencies."

HELICOPTER RESCUES PROVE SUCCESSFUL — A special federally-sponsored program of helicopter rescue for persons injured in rural areas may have saved as many as 61 lives during the program's first three months, according to the Department of Transportation. During that period, it said, a total of 100 missions were flown — 65 of those in response to highway vehicle crashes.

The Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) program, a joint effort sponsored by the U. S. departments of Transportation, Defense, and Health, Education and Welfare, was instituted in July 1970 at Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio, Texas. MAST units were later established at Fort Lewis, Washington; Fort Carson, Colorado; Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, and Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

The trial program, which was to have ended Dec. 31, 1970, has been extended until March 31, 1971. After completion of the extended MAST project, the DOT will determine whether the program should be expanded to a national effort.

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