

Status Report

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Studies Find Road Factors Leading To Rollovers

More than one in five persons killed in a vehicle in 1979 died in a single-vehicle rollover crash. Quite often the incident was this: a vehicle was going downhill and rounding a curve to the left at considerable speed when the driver lost control and the vehicle turned over near the end of the curve at the bottom of the hill.

Two new studies supported by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) have examined this major segment of vehicle occupant fatalities in an effort to determine the relationship of such crashes and the roadway and roadside characteristics that might influence them. One study deals with sites in Georgia and the other with sites in New Mexico. Such factors as road curvature, grade, and depth of roadside ditches or embankments were analyzed at fatal rollover crash sites and compared with data for sites one mile upstream that the crashed vehicles generally would have passed safely within a minute or two before their crashes.

'Freeze' Is No Problem

A Presidential order banning implementation of government regulations for the next two months will not directly affect recent actions of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

A review of the order by agency attorneys has found it specifically addresses only those regulations that would become effective within 60 days of the date the order was issued, on January 29. Many of NHTSA's standards become effective at the start of the model year in September. None is scheduled to commence within the 60-day period.

The order also does not affect notices of proposed rulemaking, although a NHTSA spokesman pointed out the administration may scrap unwanted proposals by inserting a notice in the *Federal Register* or simply by letting them drop without comment.

'Preliminary Screening Criteria'

The researchers who conducted the studies, Jerome W. Hall of the University of New Mexico and Paul Zador of IIHS for the New Mexico research, and Paul H. Wright of the Georgia Institute of Technology and Zador for the Georgia study, suggested that the alignment characteristics common to the crash sites "can serve as preliminary screening criteria to determine roadway locations needing correction." The most significant of these characteristics is a lefthand curve on steep downgrades.

(Cont'd on next page)

High, Center-Mounted Brake Lights Proposed

A new rulemaking proposal, if adopted, would require manufacturers to install high, center-mounted brake lights on cars, beginning with 1984 models.

The proposed amendment to Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 108 could cut rear-end collisions dramatically for very little cost,

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High, Center-Mounted Brake Lights Proposed (Cont'd from page 1)

the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said in a *Federal Register* notice.

NHTSA test results released last year confirmed an earlier study which showed the new brake light configuration could reduce rear-end collisions by about 50 percent. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 9, June 10, 1980.)

Out of 4.3 million rear-end crashes in 1979, NHTSA said, there were 2.85 million in which a lighted brake lamp could have had some impact on the outcome. Had the cars been equipped with the additional stop lamp, the agency projected, there would have been 1,511,800 fewer collisions.

Even when rear-end crashes occur, NHTSA said, installation of the new system should result in less severe crashes. This is because closing speeds would be slower, since drivers following behind the braking cars will see the lights sooner and thus, begin braking sooner. Lower closing speeds should also result in less severe injuries, NHTSA said. In 1979, there were a total of 1,170 fatalities and 145,000 injuries reported in rear-end crashes.

Savings in repair costs should be equally impressive, NHTSA said. Using repair cost data from its studies, the agency estimated that consumers would save \$480 million by being able to avoid rear-end crashes and another \$165 million in lowered damage costs. Adding in similar figures representing savings for the front ends of striking vehicles, the total benefit to consumers could amount to \$1.29 billion annually, NHTSA predicted.

The cost of implementing the standard would be relatively insignificant, NHTSA concluded, with the lamps costing an average of \$4.29 per car.

Comments on the proposed rule should refer to Docket No. 81-02, Notice 1, Docket Section, Room 5108, NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. They should be received no later than April 10, 1981.

Studies Find Roadway Factors Leading To Rollovers (Cont'd from page 1)

"The most dramatic difference [from the comparison sites] was with respect to roadway curvature," the New Mexico study pointed out. "While it is not possible to specify an exact value of curvature which separates safe and hazardous conditions, values of maximum curvature in excess of 5 degrees occurred at crash sites at twice the expected rate."

In addition to the alignment characteristics, certain roadside features were found to influence the probability of a rollover crash when a vehicle leaves the highway. The researchers emphasized the problem of steep embankments, and suggested that criteria for installing guardrails need to be re-examined.

"Current standards for guardrail usage do not specify the use of guardrails on embankments with heights less than four feet," the New Mexico study said, "despite the fact that over half of the fatal overturning crashes occurred with embankment heights less than this value; other data also indicate that approximately 60 percent of the run-off-the-road crashes involve low embankments and shallow ditches."

The researchers noted that fatal overturning crashes accounted for a lower percentage of all crashes in Georgia than in New Mexico, and observed that "The more extensive use of guardrails in Georgia is one factor which partially explains this difference."

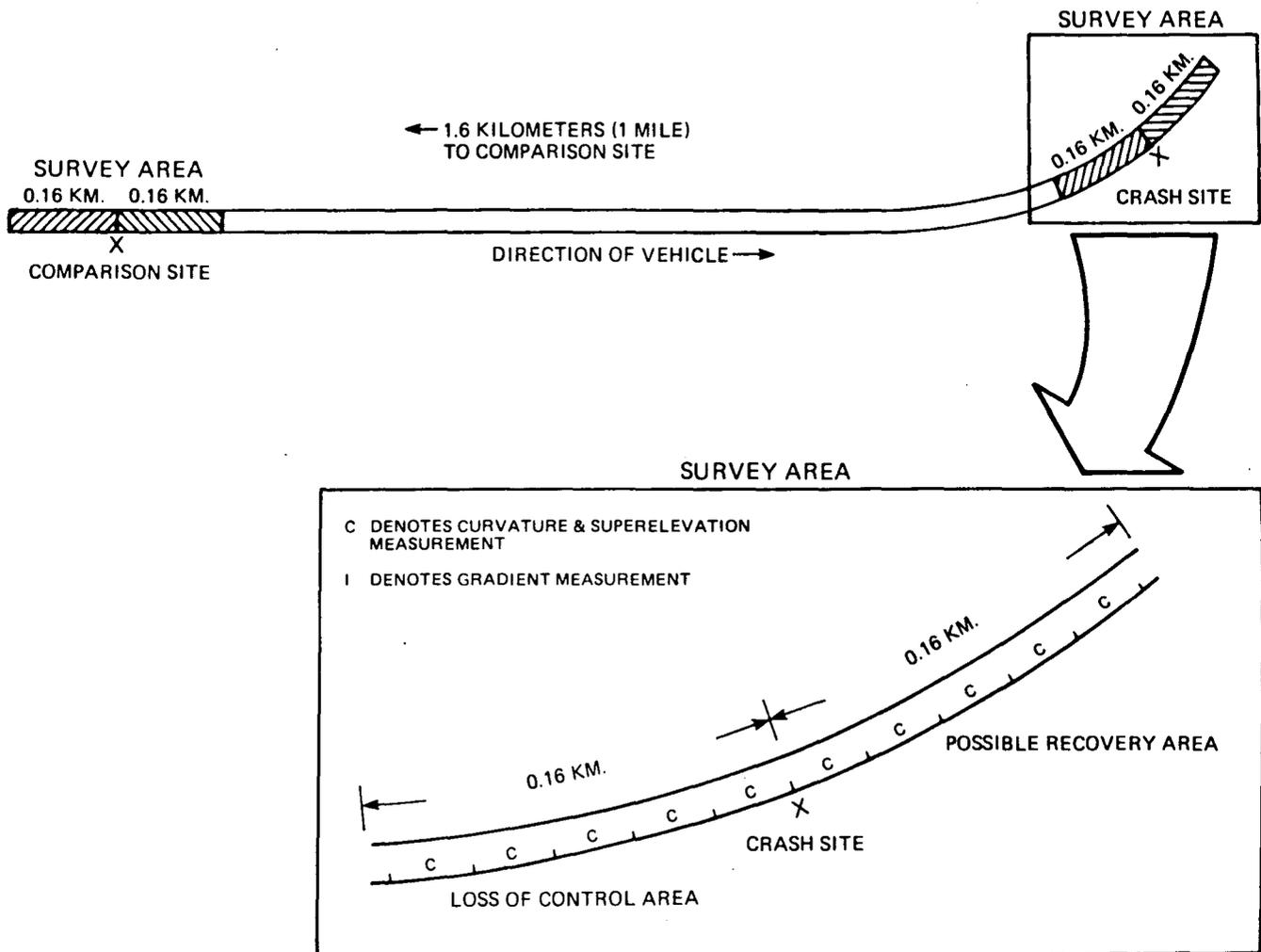
The two studies involved 151 fatal rollover crash sites in Georgia and 214 such crashes in New Mexico. The studies used the same methodology employed in earlier research into roadside hazard crashes in Georgia. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 11, No. 4, March 3, 1976.) That study indicated that highway officials should give top priority to "roadside hazard modification on and near curves greater than 6 degrees, particularly those accompanied by downhill grades of 2 percent or steeper, on nonlocal roads." That study, too, used a matching of data from a crash site with data from a comparison site one mile away.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatal Accident Reporting System nationwide data for 1979 emphasize the importance of the single-vehicle rollover crash. In that year there were 8,911 fatalities attributed to such crashes, accounting for 21 percent of the nationwide vehicle occupant fatalities. Previous research had indicated that the problem is especially critical in Western states. Yet little study has been made either of the possible causes, or of means to reduce the resulting injuries and deaths.

"The lack of previous study is probably attributable in part to traditional beliefs which hold that single-vehicle crashes are the fault of the driver rather than the roadway," said the researchers.

Copies of the new studies are available from Communications Department, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037. Ask for: "A Study of Fatal Rollover Crashes in Georgia," by Paul H. Wright and Paul Zador, and "A Survey of Single Vehicle Fatal Rollover Crash Sites in New Mexico," by Jerome W. Hall and Paul Zador.

HYPOTHETICAL FATAL CRASH AND COMPARISON SITES



Pediatricians Influence Use Of Infant Restraints

Can pediatricians as a part of regular infant care influence mothers to protect their children by properly securing them in restraints? Yes, according to a study of 269 women whose infants were attended by three pediatricians in a group practice in the Pittsburgh area.

Conducted by researchers from the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the study noted that motor vehicle crashes kill more children than any single disease, and that among children, the occupant death rate for infants is extremely high. Nevertheless, the study reported, a 1974 survey found that only 12 percent of children below the age of 2, and 6 percent of children ages 2 to 9, were correctly restrained while travelling in cars (see *Status Report*, Vol. 10, No. 10, May 12, 1975). Correct restraint use is needed in order to give children effective crash protection.

The study grew out of earlier research that evaluated the effectiveness of lay health educators in influencing mothers during their post-birth hospital stay to correctly secure their infants in restraints. Various educational programs were evaluated, and while they were found to have increased infant restraint use two to four months later, they had little or no effect on correct use. The earlier research did not address the issue of using physicians as educators, and involved a one-time message only (see *Status Report*, Vol. 12, No. 15, Oct. 13, 1977).

To learn if pediatricians could help increase correct restraint usage, the present study compared a group that received counseling about providing infants with crash protection with a group that did not. Parents were counseled on three occasions; during hospital stays after their child's birth, and at regular checkups when the infants were one and two months of age.

Effects Monitored At Different Ages

The counseling consisted of discussions on how to protect infants in cars; distributing a pamphlet on automobile crash protection; writing "prescriptions" that listed three infant restraints, their prices, and where they could be purchased locally; and an actual demonstration of how to use an infant restraint. The effect of the counseling was measured by unobtrusive observations of how infants were travelling in cars when they arrived at the pediatricians' office for checkups at 1, 2, 4, and 15 months of age.

The use of restraints anchored by car seat belts – considered the "major criterion" of proper restraint use – was found to be higher in the experimental group than in the comparison group at each observation period. The use rate was higher by 23 percent at one month, by 72 percent at 2 months, by 9 percent at 4 months, and by 12 percent at 15 months. The findings indicated that "pediatricians can be somewhat effective in increasing the protection of infants in cars, at least during the critical period in early infancy when the risk of death as a car occupant is especially great," the researchers said. They noted that the effect of the counseling was "largely diminished by four months." The results "suggest that the effect of the education was largely to influence those parents who would restrain their children in the absence of education to do so at an earlier age."

Lap Travel Persists Despite Warnings

In the study, mothers were warned about the danger involved in carrying infants on their laps during motor vehicle travel. (In even a low-speed crash, babies can be crushed between an unrestrained adult holding them and interior structures. In the case of restrained adults, babies aren't protected because adult arms aren't strong enough to hold on to them even at relatively low crash speeds. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 14, No. 8, May 17, 1979.) Despite the warnings, the percentage of babies held in someone's arms in the experimental group ranged from 22 to 32 percent, the study said. The percentage generally was somewhat higher in the comparison group, it reported.

The study recommended that "pediatricians should discuss infant crash protection with their patients routinely at every opportunity, and it is recommended that the actual demonstration of correct use of restraints be emphasized," the researchers said. "However, it is clear that further studies are needed to determine the components . . . of infant restraint education that maximize both the magnitude of effects and their duration."

The researchers added that "even at the two months point when the educational intervention was most successful, half the infants whose parents received education were not provided crash protection, and many were being transported in arms Thus although education should be a mainstay of efforts by pediatricians to increase the number of children provided crash protection . . . it is obvious that additional techniques are necessary" Measures recommended included regulations to require interior compartment designs that protect children "to the maximum extent possible" in crashes, and restraints such as air bags "that provide crash protection automatically."

The study, "The Effect of Pediatricians' Counseling on Infant Restraint Use," by Keith S. Reisinger, M.D., et. al., was funded by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and is being published in the February issue of *Pediatrics*. Copies may be obtained from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Rhode Island Child Restraint Law Evaluated

Rhode Island's new law requiring children under the age of four to be restrained while riding in autos is having a modest positive effect, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety researchers have reported.

Four months after the law took effect in July 1980, researchers observed "positive changes" in the way children were being transported in cars. "These changes increased the proportion of child car occupants restrained in rear seats, which provides maximum crash protection, and decreased the proportion of unrestrained children in front seats," the research report said.

The Rhode Island law requires any person transporting children in the front seat to secure them properly in child restraints meeting federal standards. Children in the rear seat do not have to be restrained. Failure to comply with the law is considered a moving violation and is subject to a \$15 fine. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 8, May 20, 1980.)

The researchers conducted surveys of cars exiting 20 shopping centers in the greater Providence, Rhode Island, area one month before the law went into force. Similar surveys were conducted in two Massachusetts cities to provide comparison figures. (Massachusetts, a neighboring state, does not have a child restraint law.) Both surveys were repeated in October 1980, four months after the Rhode Island law went into effect.

Surveys indicated that after the Rhode Island law took effect, proper use of child restraints increased from 22 to 35 percent. Travel in rear seats increased from 49 to 62 percent. The net result was an increase in proper restraint use in rear seats from 11 to 23 percent, and a decline in unrestrained front seat travel (41 to 26 percent).

Improved restraint use also took place in Massachusetts, although to a lesser extent. Thus, some of the Rhode Island changes may have reflected seasonal trends, the effects of the Rhode Island law in a neighboring state, or an overall increase in the awareness of all drivers about the importance of using restraints.

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Rhode Island Child Restraint Law Evaluated (Cont'd from page 5)

Tennessee and Rhode Island are the only two states that require the use of child restraints, although other states are considering such legislation. The Tennessee law, which came into force in January 1978, requires resident parents to use child restraints properly when transporting their own children who are three years old or younger. As an alternative, the Tennessee law permits children to be held in arms, a practice known to be hazardous instead of protective. The Rhode Island child restraint law applies to all adults (not just parents), and forbids the transport of children on an adult's lap, at least in the front seat. On the other hand, the Rhode Island law applies only to children in the front seat; the Tennessee law covers children in all seating positions.

The proper use of child restraints rose in Tennessee from 8 to 16 percent in the four months after the law took effect, while in Kentucky (a state without child restraint requirements) there was a slight rise from 11 to 15 percent. The Tennessee law was re-evaluated in May 1980, after nearly 2½ years in force. The second survey showed that restraint use had climbed to almost 29 percent. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 13, No. 7, May 31, 1978; and Vol. 15, No. 10, June 25, 1980.) Subsequent evaluation of the Rhode Island law may find a similar increase in compliance as people become more aware of the law's requirements and of the importance of restraining children in autos.

A More Desirable Child Restraint Law

In their discussion of the effects of the Rhode Island law, the Institute researchers noted that "further gains might be forthcoming were the law amended to require restraint use wherever seated." The most desirable child restraint law would require *all* children to be restrained in motor vehicles at all times, and would further specify that children be transported in rear seats, the report said.

FHWA Proposes 'Flexible Approach' To RRR Standards

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is making its third attempt since 1976 to settle a controversy over what design standards should be followed by states carrying out federally-assisted road work on deteriorated stretches of highways other than freeways.

This latest proposal is aimed at providing a "flexible approach" to applying design standards to federal-aid "resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation" (RRR) projects, FHWA said in a new notice of proposed rulemaking. It replaces a 1978 proposal that would have established national standards written by the agency. Instead of national requirements, FHWA now wants each state to develop its own "procedures and criteria," which the agency would then have to approve.

Subject Of Controversy Since 1976

The controversy began brewing after Congress in 1976 decided that federal highway funds could be used for RRR work. The RRR standards followed since then have been those approved by FHWA for new highway construction, which allow for exceptions to the rules on a case-by-case basis. Faced with the growing problem of deteriorating highways, many states have favored lowered safety design standards that would allow them to stretch available RRR funds and conduct road work over a greater number of highway miles. But many safety advocates have cautioned that the ultimate cost of working under lowered standards – including higher costs resulting from more vehicle crashes – may outweigh possible initial savings in project costs.

Strong criticism has been voiced by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and other safety

groups of both the 1978 proposal, and a 1977 proposal based on standards developed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). (See *Status Report*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Jan. 25, 1979, and Vol. 12, No. 18, Dec. 23, 1977.) The Institute has warned that the proposed standards would allow sharply-reduced lane and shoulder widths, less banking on curves, and shortened stopping and passing sight distances, among other unsafe design features.

Under the current proposal, FHWA says, states could follow existing standards, those set forth in the 1977 and 1978 proposals, "or other criteria, including various combinations of the above." There are no specific criteria FHWA would use in deciding whether state requirements adequately provide for safety, an agency spokesman said.

The proposed policy says "the only constraint on the application of federal-aid funds to RRR work is that they must be used to provide a facility that adequately meets existing and probable future traffic needs and conditions in a manner conducive to safety, durability, and economy of maintenance, and acceptable levels of community and environmental impact." It adds that "RRR projects should be designed and constructed in a manner that will prevent deterioration of safety and yet accomplish the foregoing objectives according to the particular needs of each state and locality."

Agency Contends Needs Vary

Explaining FHWA's present emphasis on "flexibility," an agency official said that expenditures on design features in one kind of terrain may be inappropriate in another. For example, the official explained, shoulder widths could probably be narrower in Kansas with its flat terrain and relatively low volume of traffic than in mountainous terrain such as West Virginia, without having adverse safety consequences.

Current RRR requirements "to some extent" do provide flexibility, FHWA said. But it indicated that having national standards would involve too many requests for exceptions. This would prove unduly burdensome both for FHWA and those making the requests, and "might unnecessarily delay needed improvements," the agency said.

As part of its rulemaking, FHWA conducted a study predicting the effects on safety and other consequences of adopting various levels of design standards. The highest standards were those for new highway

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NHTSA, FHWA Appointees Named

Raymond A. Peck, Jr., an executive of the National Coal Association with experience in regulatory affairs but no experience in major vehicle or highway safety issues, has been named as President Reagan's choice to head the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Prior to his employment by the coal industry, Peck dealt with energy regulation in both the Treasury and Interior departments under the Ford Administration. Under the Nixon Administration, Peck served as special counsel to the Commerce Department.

President Reagan also named Ray Barnhart, a member of Texas' State Highway and Public Transportation Commission, to head the Federal Highway Administration. The Texas State Highway and Public Transportation Commission is the policymaking agency governing construction and maintenance of state roads.

Both appointments are subject to Senate confirmation.

FHWA Proposes 'Flexible Approach' To RRR Standards (Cont'd from page 7)

construction, applied without exceptions, and the lowest were those contained in the 1978 FHWA proposal. "Mid-case" requirements, which FHWA said fell between the two preceding levels and closely represented current state practice, also were studied.

The study concluded that if funding were unlimited, adhering to the standards for new construction would provide the greatest drop in deaths and injuries. However, given limited funding, the study indicated that greater reductions would occur if standards more closely paralleling the two lower levels were followed. This is largely because RRR work could be done on a greater number of miles of highway, FHWA said. According to an agency official, the study was not precise enough to allow firm conclusions as to whether the 1978 proposed standards or those approximating current state practice were more effective in cutting deaths and injuries.

Comments on the new proposal should be sent to FHWA Docket No. 80-3, Federal Highway Administration, Room 4205, HCC-10, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. They must be received by the agency no later than May 5, 1981.

Automatic Restraint Rule A Question Of 'Timing'

Andrew Lewis, Jr., the newly-appointed Secretary of Transportation, has said implementation of the automatic restraint rule is mainly a question of "timing."

During a press conference announcing the formation of an interagency task force to study auto industry problems, Lewis said the only question about implementation of the automatic restraint standard is whether it should be reversed to start with small cars first. "The only problem we may have in that area," said Lewis, "is the time line."

The standard requiring automatic protection in 30 mph frontal barrier crashes for front seat occupants, is scheduled to take effect with next year's large cars. The standard won't apply to small cars until the 1984 model year, under the current timetable.

Lewis refused to designate any NHTSA regulations for extinction, saying it will be the function of the task force to review data gathered under former Transportation Secretary Neil Goldschmidt. One of the functions of the task force, said Lewis, will be a review of regulations to see where they "can be eased without sacrificing the necessary safety and emissions standards."

The task force will be chaired by Lewis and its members will include Donald T. Regan, Secretary of the Treasury; Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Commerce; Raymond Donovan, Secretary of Labor; William Brock, the U.S. Trade Representative; and Murray Weidenbaum, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors.

Lewis said there will be a departmental task force which will review regulations "line-by-line" for cost effectiveness. Following their study of industry conditions, Lewis said the interagency force will submit a package of proposals on revitalizing the auto industry to President Reagan.

Meanwhile, in testimony before the Senate Surface Transportation Subcommittee, representatives of Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors told Chairman John Danforth (R.-Mo.) they would support an immediate moratorium on new auto regulation and extensive revision of some standards now in place. Top on each auto maker's list for revision, was the automatic restraint standard, followed by emissions controls and a rule requiring bumpers to withstand a 5 mph impact, with no damage.

Commerce Committee Drops Consumer Subcommittee

The committee charged with oversight over the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has dropped the Consumer Protection and Finance Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. James Scheuer (D.-N.Y.), in favor of setting up two energy subcommittees.

Formerly the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, the committee was reorganized by its new chairman, Rep. John Dingell, (D.-Mich.) to become the House's lead committee on energy matters. Its new name, the Committee on Energy and Commerce, reflects that shift.

Under the reorganization announced by Dingell, the Democratic members of the committee voted to strip Scheuer, the second-ranking Democrat, of his chairmanship and distributed the Consumer Subcommittee's oversight functions among three subcommittees. The responsibility for legislative oversight over NHTSA has been delegated to the Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Consumer Protection, and Finance, chaired by Rep. Timothy Wirth (D.-Colo.).

Scheuer publicly charged Dingell with conducting a personal vendetta against him, in direct response to his support for air bags, which Dingell has vehemently opposed. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 20, Dec. 22, 1980.)

Anti-Lacerative Windshield To Be Considered

A European windshield that promises to dramatically reduce disfiguring lacerations in crashes may be permitted in the U.S. auto marketplace.

In a *Federal Register* notice, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has started rulemaking that could result in dropping a technical barrier to the import.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety had urged rulemaking to permit domestic introduction of the windshield. Called the Securiflex Inner Guard, it is produced by Saint-Gobain Vitrage of France. The windshield is much the same as other current laminated windshields except it features a layer of a special plastic film on the interior surface. The plastic acts as a shield between occupants and shattered glass. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 13, Aug. 14, 1980.)

Currently, laminated windshields must pass an abrasion test developed for both interior and exterior surfaces. While the plastic on the Securiflex will not meet the test, the material is self-healing; when scratched, it will return to an unblemished state.

Ironically, while barred from use on mass-produced autos in the U.S., the windshield was selected for use in a research safety vehicle developed under contract with NHTSA. The windshield is currently widely available on a number of European autos.

NHTSA said in its advance notice of proposed rulemaking that it will consider the "safety consequences" of dropping the test requirement for the inner surface of the European windshield, which could pave the way for its introduction in the U.S. auto market.

Persons seeking further information on the subject should contact Edward Jettner, Office of Vehicle Safety Standards, Room 5320, NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Crash Rating Program Proposed By NHTSA

In a notice of rulemaking proposed by the outgoing administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has said it intends to establish a program of voluntary manufacturer ratings of new car performance in 35 mph front and rear barrier crashes.

The crash ratings would provide consumers information on the safety performance of new cars in the dealer showroom. The program is designed to encourage manufacturers to compete in building safer cars.

The proposal is based on NHTSA's new car assessment program in which 44 1979 and 1980 model cars were tested in 35 mph front and rear barrier crashes. Only 12 cars tested met all performance criteria set under the current safety standards in 30 mph crash tests. The 35 mph crash tests provide a 36 percent increase in severity over 30 mph barrier crashes. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 14, Sept. 17, 1980.)

The rating program was proposed in order to meet a provision in the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act of 1972, requiring the agency to provide consumers with information relating to the crashworthiness of new cars.

Under the proposal, manufacturers would have the option of certifying to NHTSA, and specifying on a window sticker in dealer showrooms, that their vehicles meet the standards criteria when tested at an impact speed of 35 mph or more. Actual crash testing would not be required, but manufacturers who choose not to verify that their cars exceed the performance standards at 35 mph would be required to state their cars do not exceed the legal requirements.

NHTSA said public and press reaction to the agency's new car assessment program, along with polling data, indicates "the public is concerned about crashworthiness and would be influenced by crashworthiness ratings."

The program would be particularly important to small car buyers, NHTSA said, since 1979 crash statistics indicate that 51 percent of all passenger fatalities occurred in small cars, even though small cars account for only 38 percent of the total vehicle fleet. That percentage is bound to rise; compacts and subcompacts now account for about 60 percent of new car sales, the agency said.

The barrier tests reflect only what might be expected if a car crashed into another car of similar size and weight, NHTSA said. In crashes between compact and larger vehicles at the same speed, the smaller cars are at a disadvantage. Even when small cars crash into each other, the occupants fare worse than they would in larger cars crashing together. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 13, No. 17, Nov. 30, 1978.)

NHTSA predicted the overall industry start-up cost would be \$3 million if begun in 1983, with an annual overall cost of \$240,000 thereafter. Comments on the proposal should be received no later than April 22, 1981, and should be directed to Docket No. 79-17, Notice 1, NHTSA, Room 5108, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

UPDATE . . .

INVESTIGATION DROPPED: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has decided not to further investigate the possible proneness of certain Toyota automobile fuel tanks to failure in rear-end collisions. In a letter responding to an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety request in July 1980 for such an investigation, an agency spokesman said that NHTSA's "analysis to date does not indicate sufficient likelihood that a safety defect exists in the fuel reservoir system of these vehicles to warrant further commitment of resources to this inquiry." (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 10, June 25, 1980.) In filings with the agency, IIHS had drawn the agency's attention to 29 reported Toyota rear-end crashes with fire, involving 39 deaths and 18 nonfatal injuries.

Regulatory Roundup

During the final days of the Carter Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) issued a series of rulemaking actions, some of them advance notices of proposed rulemaking and others final rules. Some matters had been pending for months, even years.

President Reagan has issued a 60-day moratorium aimed at "midnight" rulemaking but, according to NHTSA interpretation, none of its rules and proposals will be affected. Here is a synopsis of some of the notices as they appeared in the *Federal Register* - others are covered in separate *Status Report* stories:

- **Safety belts** - Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 208, Occupant Crash Protection, has been amended to eliminate "some of the most egregious disincentives" to the use of current belt systems and automatic belt designs. The purpose of the rule is to make belt systems more comfortable and convenient to use, since studies have shown that many people report that they choose not to wear belts because they are either difficult to reach, rub against the neck, or become too tight for comfort during wear. The rule is final, scheduled to take effect Sept. 1, 1982.

- **Visibility** - FMVSS 128, Fields of Direct View, has been amended to limit the visual obstruction caused by front and rear pillars. Scheduled to go into effect with the 1985 model year, it has been more than 10 years in the making. The rule is similar to visibility requirements set for cars sold in the European community. The agency also ruled on visibility requirements for tinted windshields, since the tinting reduces visibility at night, particularly for older drivers.

- **Tires** - In an advance notice, the agency asked for comments concerning low-pressure warning devices for tires. NHTSA said it is considering a rule to require each new motor vehicle to be equipped with a device that would warn the driver when the tire pressure in any of the vehicle's tires was significantly below recommended operating levels. Comments should be received by March 27, 1981, and should be directed to Docket No. 81-05.

- **Brakes** - In a final rule, NHTSA extended the current hydraulic brake standard for school buses and cars to trucks, all types of buses, and multipurpose passenger vehicles that weigh 10,000 lbs. or less. The rule is scheduled to go into effect Sept. 1, 1983, and would apply to the 1984 model year. The agency did agree to modify the standard, relaxing stopping distance requirements for vehicles weighing between 8,000 and 10,000 lbs.

- **Theft protection** - Theft protection features found on current passenger cars will be required on light trucks and vans beginning with the 1983 model year, NHTSA ruled. The standard was also strengthened slightly to prevent drivers from inadvertently locking the steering wheel of a moving vehicle. NHTSA said the rule's extension was necessary because the rising popularity of vans and trucks has made them a favorite target for thieves, and stolen vehicles are 47 to 200 times more likely to be involved in crashes.

- **Enforcement** - In a proposed notice of rulemaking, NHTSA signaled its intention to develop standard performance requirements and test methods for evaluating radar devices. Although radar has been used for more than 30 years as an accepted enforcement tool, there are currently no standards regulating the quality of the devices. The *Federal Register* notice, issued January 8, provides a detailed description of the proposed rule.

All comments to the docket should be addressed to NHTSA, Docket Room 5108, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C., 20590.

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