

Teenagers, Males Are More Involved in Fatal Crashes

Far higher numbers of teenage drivers are involved in fatal crashes per mile driven than older drivers, and the situation is at its worst at night, a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study has shown.

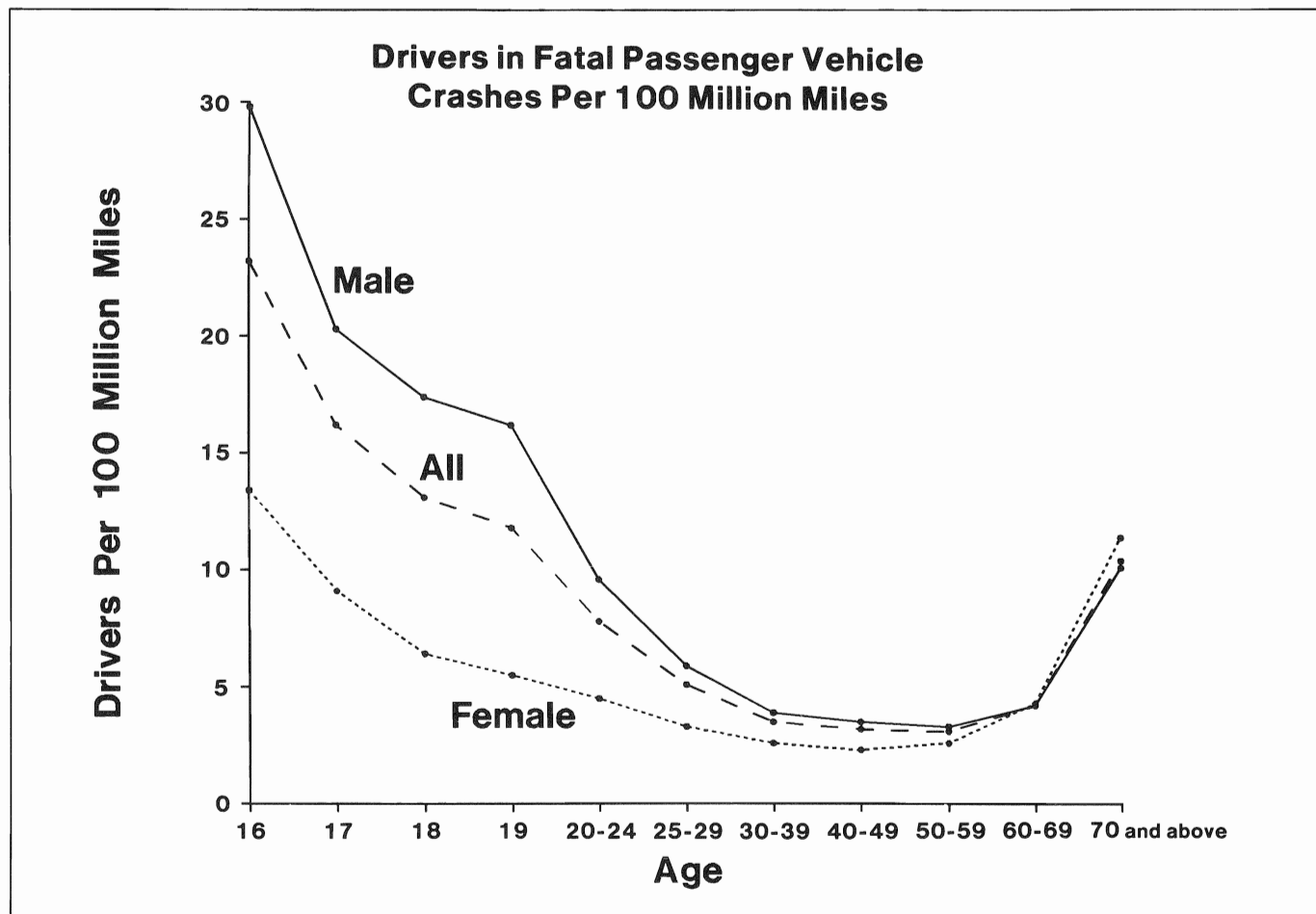
But female drivers — whether teenagers or older — have substantially less involvement in fatal crashes per mile driven than male drivers, the study also found.

The study was written by Dr. Allan F. Williams, the Institute's senior behavioral scientist. It will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, a quarterly journal of scholarly research concerning injury loss issues.

The new study's key results were summed up in three charts, which show the following:

- *Drivers in fatal passenger vehicle crashes per 100 million miles. Male involvement is more than twice as high as female involvement for drivers age 16 through the early 20s. Furthermore, female involvement remains lower than male involvement until well into the 50s.*
- *Male drivers in fatal passenger vehicle crashes per 100 million miles, by time of day.*

(Cont'd on page 2)



Teenagers, Males More Involved In Fatal Crashes Per Mile

(Cont'd from page 1)

For 16-year-old male drivers, nighttime involvement is nearly four times greater than daytime involvement. The differences are somewhat less for older drivers but continue to be substantial into the middle years.

- *Female drivers in fatal passenger vehicle crashes per 100 million miles, by time of day.* Although nighttime involvement for females of all ages is somewhat higher than daytime involvement, a comparison with the previous chart shows that it is substantially lower than that of male drivers from age 16 through the early 30s.

Noting the high incidence of nighttime fatal crash involvement for teenagers, the author said it is likely that "most of the travel that takes place during these late night hours, and during nighttime hours in general, involves recreational purposes, and is not 'essential' travel."

An earlier Institute study found that "curfew" laws restricting the nighttime driving of teenagers have been associated with substantially decreased crash involvement by 16-year-olds. Thus, the author concluded that it is "likely that a substantial reduction in fatalities could be achieved through more widespread appli-

cation of such laws, without greatly reducing the driving of 16 year olds."

Copies of the study "Nighttime Driving and Fatal Crash Involvement of Teenagers," by Allan F. Williams, may be obtained by writing: Nighttime Driving, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Center Sues FHWA To Keep Big Trucks Off Narrow Roads

The Center for Auto Safety is suing to stop the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) from opening narrow, two-lane roads to double trailers and 102-inch wide trucks.

Unless the agency decision is reversed, the Center charged, there will be a rise in truck crashes, and deaths and injuries will rise as well.

In a 1982 appropriations measure, Congress authorized 102-inch truck widths on roads with 12-foot lanes. Separately, it adopted the Surface Transportation Assistance Act, which allowed truck loads of 80,000 pounds and double trailers on interstate highways and other federal-aid roads that could "safely accommodate" them.

The Center, represented by attorney Katherine Hall, asked Judge Gerhard Gesell, of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, to order the FHWA to withdraw its interim designation of highways issued as a proposed final rule last fall. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 18, No. 15, Oct. 17, 1983.) Although some controversial roads had been withdrawn from the proposed network, the Center alleges, many other poor roads are still part of the network, despite the objections of state highway officials and the warnings of some of FHWA's own regional administrators.

A hearing on the Center's motion for preliminary injunction has been set for March 1, Hall told *Status Report*. The court will also hear arguments by Consolidated Freightways, which has filed suit to force the agency to open up even more roads to the larger trucks.

The agency ignored the lane limitation set in the statute for the wider trucks, and simply connected roads in a network without evaluating the safety impact, said the Center. When FHWA issued the proposed final rule, the agency said it would be "impractical" to set aside one system of highways to accommodate the width provisions and yet another to meet the longer length provisions set by Congress.

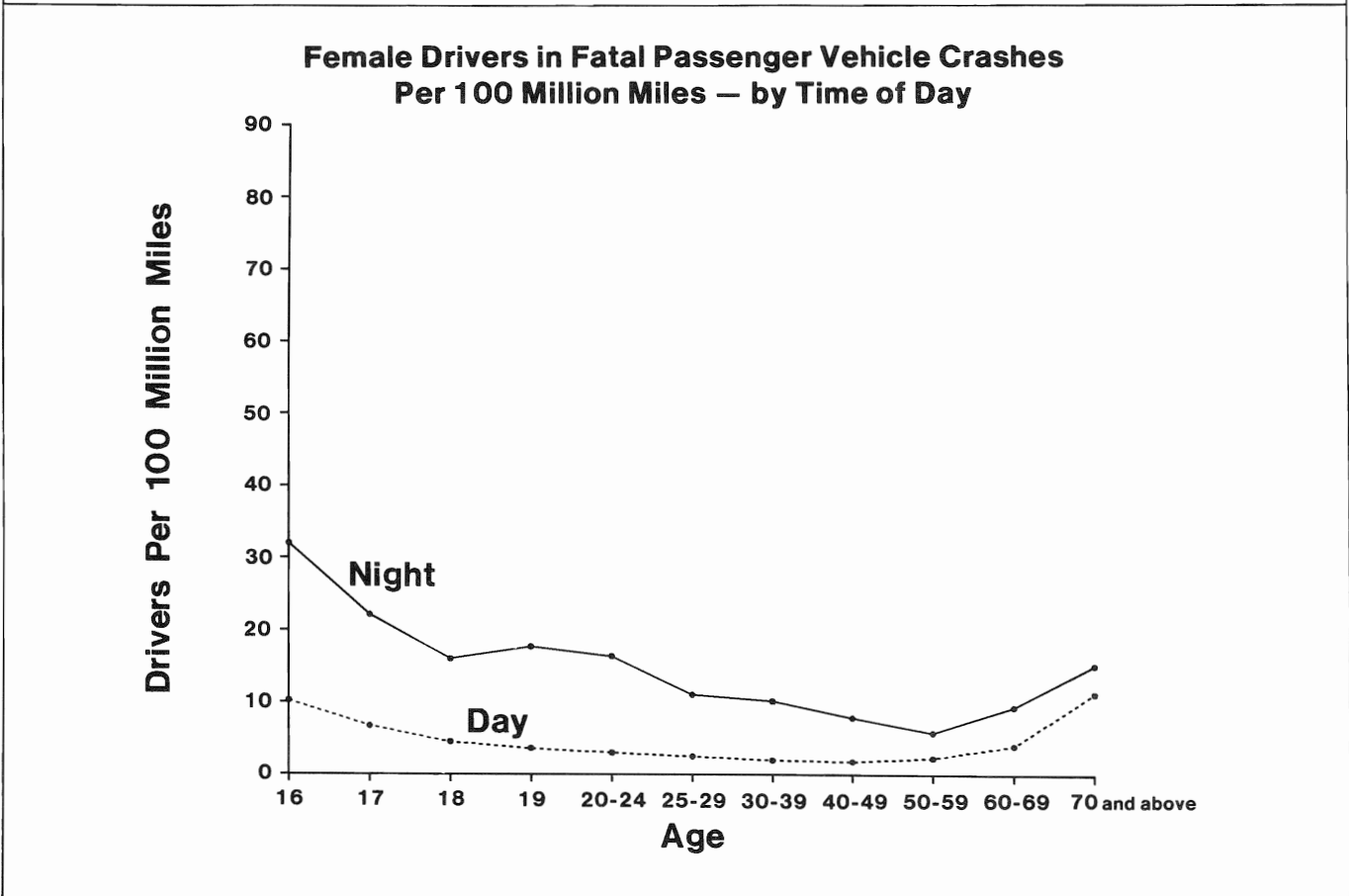
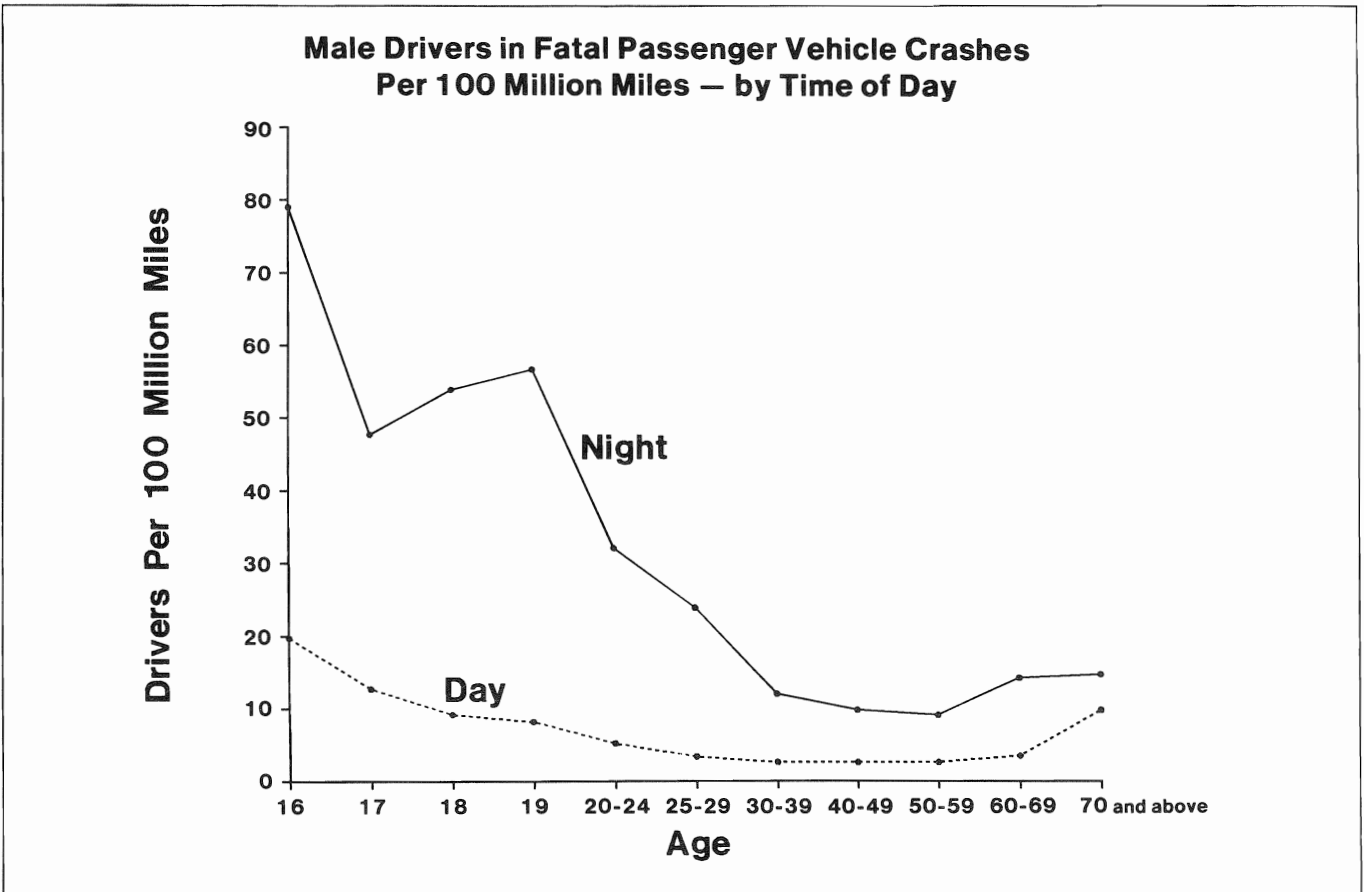
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NHTSA Official Named

Howard Smolkin, an economist with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), has been named deputy administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Most recently, Smolkin headed the OMB's economics and government special studies division, which provides analyses of industrial, regulatory, trade, finance, budget, and other legislative issues.

In other recent personnel shifts, Dr. Kennerly Diggs, who has been serving as acting associate administrator for rulemaking, has moved to the research and development branch where he will serve as deputy associate administrator, and Barry Felrice, head of the plans and programs section, has become associate administrator for rulemaking. Ellen Kranidas is now the acting associate administrator for plans and programs.



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(Cont'd from page 2)

At the same time, FHWA told the states they would have the burden of proving whether a designated route was unsafe for the larger trucks. That policy decision, in effect, shifts the safety responsibility to the states, which would violate FHWA's statutory obligation, the Center charged.

Forty-eight foot, 102-inch wide trailers swing beyond even 12-foot lanes on relatively moderate curves, the Center noted, and on narrower roads the intrusion into oncoming traffic lanes will be more dangerous.

On narrow, winding two-lane roads, safety experts fear that trucks hauling two trailers will present an extremely hazardous passing problem especially for smaller cars with less driver visibility.

Research has shown that double trailers are involved in more crashes than single trailer trucks. (See *Status Report* Vol. 18, No. 4, March 8, 1983.) In an affidavit, Patricia Waller, a research professor and associate director for driver studies at the University of North Carolina's Highway Safety Research Center, said that operation of longer and wider trucks on substandard roadways "threatens an increase in the rate and severity of truck crashes and ... deaths and injuries."

'Car Book' Is Expanded In Latest Edition

A 1984 buyer's guide to new and used cars is now available.

The new expanded edition of *The Car Book* provides, for the first time, projected and actual automobile performance ratings relating to crashworthiness, gas mileage, maintenance and repair, and insurance rates.

The safety and maintenance ratings for 1984 models are based on the models' previous performance.

This and an earlier edition of the book were produced with the support of the Center for Auto Safety. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 18, No. 6, April 22, 1983.)

The guide, written by Jack Gillis, gives detailed information on child restraints, how to buy and install them, and lists the states requiring their use. It also contains tips on how to buy a new or used car, details

on recalls for safety defects, and information on tires, how to handle maintenance, and a guide to resolving complaints.

The paperback edition, published by E. P. Dutton, is available for \$7.95 at bookstores, or may be purchased through the mail from the Center for Auto Safety, 2001 S Street NW, Suite 410, Washington, D.C., 20009 for \$8.95.

Risk Behind the Wheel Is No Greater For Heart Attack Victims

Ever since drivers' licenses have been issued, many have assumed that, as a group, people with heart disease are at greater risk behind the wheel than other motorists.

Now a New England study has shown that assumption to be incorrect: Drivers with chronic heart disease are not overly involved in vehicle crashes.

In the study, the records of 725 licensed drivers who had been hospitalized for heart attacks in Chittenden County, Vermont, were matched retrospectively by age and sex with other drivers covering a six-year period. The crash rate for the heart patients was 4.8 percent per year compared with 6.8 and 8.2 percent for those matched by age, sex, and residence; and those matched by sex and residence, respectively.

The researchers attributed the lower rate in part to the fact that patients tended to limit their driving and to avoid stressful driving conditions.

The low crash rate does not mean, said the researchers, that persons with cardiovascular and ischemic heart disease could be employed as truck drivers and expect equivalently low crash rates. "The driving and overall vehicle monitoring tasks of commercial vehicles are more physically demanding, do not lend themselves to selective exposure, and require high annual mileage," they said.

The research, conducted by Thomas J. Naughton, Jr., Richard D. Pepler, and Julian A. Waller, was undertaken in part to develop a methodology for studying the epidemiology of vehicle crashes associated with medical impairment, and partly to determine the relative crash risk of persons who have been hospitalized for diseases resulting in coronary insufficiency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said in a note announcing the study results.

The final report may be obtained by writing for "Investigate Road Accident Risk Levels for Heart Attack (Myocardial Infarction) Victims," DOT HS 806-383, the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 22161.

California Bill Would Require State to Buy Cars With Air Bags in 1986

A California lawmaker has introduced a bill to require air bags in all state-owned or leased automobiles starting January 1, 1986.

State Senator Diane Watson, head of the health and welfare committee, said federal law preempts the state from requiring that cars sold in California be equipped with air bags, but "the time has come for the state to assert itself and provide for additional means of safety." Calling the bill, supported by doctors, hospitals, and insurers, a "first step" in lowering the highway toll, Watson said that in 1982 there were nearly half a million auto accidents on California highways. Over 4,000 people died and another 200,000 were injured in those crashes.

Hearings before her committee last fall showed that about 300 Californians are paralyzed or brain-damaged each year in automobile crashes, Watson said. "Their medical treatment necessitates 350,000 hospital-bed days annually" with medical costs of \$680 million each year. Of that, \$23 million is subsidized by California's Medicare system.

"Total state government costs for publicly subsidized medical care, rehabilitation, and family support exceeds \$3.5 billion annually in California," Watson said.

"If we are concerned about the health of our citizens, if we are concerned about spiraling medical and insurance costs, and if we are concerned about reducing the pain and suffering of those people who

Update

Pennsylvania has become the 41st state to require young children and infants to ride protected by safety belts or approved child restraints in motor vehicles. During 1984 offenders will have the \$25 fine waived, but after that, all money collected will go to help buy restraints for needy families.

have been in auto accidents, then we must, as conscientious lawmakers and citizens, investigate the best technology available...." said Watson.

Each year, the state buys or leases 5,000 automobiles, a spokesman said. The aide said the proposal has been greeted with interest by Ford Motor Co., which is currently negotiating with the General Services Administration on the purchase of 5,000 air-bag-equipped automobiles. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Jan. 27, 1984.)

A hearing on the bill is scheduled for March before the California Senate transportation committee.

Pressure Mounts For Better Safety Rules For Trucks and Buses

Congress may enact new safety regulations for the trucking and busing industries before adjourning this summer.

Three bills have already been introduced in this session: two in the Senate and one in the house.

In a hearing before the surface transportation subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee, Chairman Jack Danforth, Missouri Republican, predicted his bill, S. 2174, has a "good chance of being enacted." This speculation was reinforced when a broad range of interest groups praised the bill, and congressional staff members agreed that an uncontroversial measure is likely.

The measure would grant the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) broad authority to assure that trucks and buses are safely maintained, equipped, loaded, and operated. It would also allow the bureau to prosecute safety violations through civil rather than criminal procedures.

S. 2174 would also require BMCS set national standards and mandate annual inspections.

The Danforth bill would also require the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and BMCS to establish specific safety fitness standards for carriers entering the market or seeking to extend their operations. Additionally, it authorizes heavy truck safety research including study of occupant safety problems.

Although some modification of the bill's provisions were requested, all who testified — James Burnley, deputy secretary of transportation; Reese Taylor, chairman of the ICC; the American Trucking Assn.;

(Cont'd on page 6)

Pressure Mounts for Better Safety Rules for Trucks and Buses

(Cont'd from page 5)

state regulators; Teamsters; private truck operators; bus owners; and independent truck owner-operators — supported the bill.

Economics plays a part in the support for safety regulation. Since deregulation, the marketplace — in the words of Marshall Siegel of the Independent Truck Owner-Operators Assn. — “is the final arbiter of financial ability.”

“Safety costs money,” Siegel told the subcommittee, “and a carrier must have adequate resources or safety will suffer. The cost of compliance with safety regulation is not a small one, and a carrier operating on a shoestring budget will simply cut corners at every opportunity.”

If safety rules are enforced, carriers who observe safety regulations will not be undercut by those who ignore work rules for drivers and vehicle maintenance.

Taylor urged Danforth to consider strengthening the bill's language regarding “safety fitness” checks to make it clear that safety is an “overriding” concern of the Congress.

Michael Skrak, staff director of the House Government Operations transportation subcommittee, who has studied the BMCS extensively, says fitness checks and enforcement of even current regulations could serve as an economic barrier to marginal carriers.

The Government Operations Committee recently released a report critical of the BMCS' effectiveness as regulator of truck safety and transportation of hazardous materials. (See accompanying story, this page.) Since then, Cardiss Collins, chairwoman of the subcommittee, has introduced in the House a bill, H.R. 4824, that incorporates the Danforth bill's objectives.

Collins' bill would also reorganize the BMCS and move it out of the Federal Highway Administration's jurisdiction and place it under the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). DOT Secretary Elizabeth Dole is also seeking legislation to move the BMCS into a “National Traffic Safety Administration.” (See *Status Report*, Vol. 18, No. 14, Oct. 4, 1983.) The bill, S. 2173, has been introduced but no hearing has been set for the measure.

Under Collins' proposal, the director of the BMCS would be associate administrator with line authority over all BMCS personnel. Dole's proposal would simply rename NHTSA and place the BMCS under its purview, without outlining its organization. Some in

the bureau fear the administration plans to dissolve the bureau and scatter its functions throughout NHTSA.

House Committee Report Is Strongly Critical Of Carrier Safety Bureau

After a seven-month investigation, the House Committee on Government Operations has released a comprehensive report strongly critical of the government's safety regulation of the motor carrier industry.

Some of its conclusions are:

- “BMCS [Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety] finds itself in the peculiar position of being the policeman for the motor carrier industry without knowing the names and locations of all motor carriers.”
- The bureau, which has a minuscule staff in comparison to its responsibilities, “lacks the will and the technical sophistication ... to enforce hazardous materials transportation regulations.”
- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) “has established policies which subvert congressional purposes and strait-jacket the BMCS enforcement program.”
- “BMCS administrators have failed to ensure that sufficient documentation exists” for proper auditing of carriers.

“The report was a good report,” says BMCS head Ken Pierson. The committee “actually went out ... and got a feel for what some of [the] problems are,” he said, though he disagrees with the committee's findings on lack of documentation.

The Government Operations Committee of the House of Representatives reports to Congress on the performance of government agencies. Although the committee does not write authorizing legislation, it does make legislative recommendations to reform existing machinery.

Since Congress ended economic regulation of the trucking and bus industries in 1980, some congressional observers have been concerned about the impact of deregulation on safety. In 1979, the committee report stated, the cost of transporting chemicals in tank trucks averaged about \$1.45 a mile per hundred weight. Now, the average rate is under \$1.00. Competitive

pressures on haulers, witnesses charged in hearings before the subcommittee, have resulted in less maintenance, truckers driving excessive hours, and growing use of substandard cargo carriers that in crashes are more likely to rupture and spill hazardous cargoes.

Currently, the BMCS has about 280 employees and an annual budget of \$13 million to regulate some 340,000 interstate carriers — about 40 percent of all trucking. BMCS regulations require motor carriers to report accidents involving more than \$2,000 in property damage or involving fatalities or injuries. About 30,000 such crashes are reported each year, the Department of Transportation says, and of those, 750 are passenger bus crashes.

Because these data are self-reported, industry critics say the reports far understate the actual extent of the problems — including the release of hazardous materials into the environment.

“BMCS audits regularly show reportable hazardous material incidents that are not reported,” the committee report said. “Bureau officials privately conceded to subcommittee staff that 30 percent to 40 percent of reportable hazardous material incidents are never reported.”

The BMCS’ fundamental weakness, committee Chairwoman Cardiss Collins says, “is the lack of compatibility between the missions of the two organizations [BMCS and FHWA]. While FHWA is expected to serve the transportation industry, the bureau ought to maintain more of an adversarial role with that industry.”

The fact is, says Collins, “FHWA is perceived to be in close cooperation with the transportation industry.” That “deters drivers and others from volunteering information to the bureau. Drivers, fearing their names will be passed on to their carriers, tolerate unsafe operating conditions which pose grave threats to the public and to their own personal safety.”

In addition, Collins says, “the FHWA has required BMCS to adopt an unworkable organizational structure. The BMCS director does not have direct control over his agents in the field. Central [FHWA] control over BMCS agents hurts coordination of enforcement efforts...” Collins says.

The BMCS audits about 3 percent or 10,000 interstate motor carriers each year, and of those, less than 1 percent — about 300 — of the audits result in fines. The average fine has dropped in recent years, the committee reported, down to \$2,000 for companies and \$150 for drivers. In effect, says the committee, BMCS shot itself in the foot when, in an effort to lessen employers’ paperwork, the agency cut down on essential reporting. Driver logs now contain less information, making it difficult to track violations.

One committee recommendation: make companies with dubious safety records keep more extensive records.

Furthermore, of the cases brought each year against carriers, violators can rest easy, fairly certain that FHWA’s “multilayered bureaucracy” will “lose” their cases. The FHWA routinely drops cases more than a year old, even though the statute provides five years for prosecution of civil and criminal cases, the committee reported.

And when FHWA attorneys do sit down with carrier representatives at “informal” settlement discussions, “all formalities are dropped,” the committee says. “The agency routinely relies upon unsupported representations and ‘new evidence’ inexplicably unavailable during the primary investigation. Settlements of serious offenses are completed without calling upon the original investigator to review the ‘new evidence’ and without attempting to resolve fundamental conflicts in that evidence. There is no accountability” the committee concluded.

The very structure of BMCS, limited personnel, lack of clerical assistance for inspectors, insufficient technical training in identification of hazardous cargoes, the lowering of salaries, lack of administrative and legal support for enforcement activities, along with a public perception that BMCS officials are too cozy with the industry they regulate, has contributed to severe morale problems, the committee concluded.

Among its recommendations:

- Enact legislation to increase BMCS access to sanctions for safety violations by making civil penalties — which are easier to pursue — more available and the fines stiffer.
- Reorganization of the Department of Transportation “to make the bureau more independent, cohesive, and aggressive.”
- Increased funding for staff and travel.
- Closer coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency and possible coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- Termination of FHWA’s self-imposition of constraints on active enforcement.
- Tightening of settlement procedures to assure accountability.
- Order the General Accounting Office to fully investigate all irregularities described in the committee report.
- Revision of DOT records to accurately reflect the names and addresses of all carriers, terminals, and other facilities.

On The Inside

- **TEENAGE DRIVERS:** Far higher numbers of young drivers are involved in fatal crashes per mile driven than older drivers, and the situation is worse at night, a new IIHS study shows. ...Page 1
- **NHTSA NAMES** Howard Smolkin, an economist, to the post of deputy administrator of the agency. ...Page 2
- **CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY** sues to stop FHWA from opening narrow, two lane roads to double trailers and 102-inch wide trucks. ...Page 2
- **HEART DISEASE:** New England study discovers that drivers with chronic heart disease are not overly involved in vehicle crashes. ...Page 4
- **THE CAR BOOK:** An expanded edition of the auto buyer's guide is now available. ...Page 4
- **CALIFORNIA LAWMAKER** introduces a bill to require air bags in all state-owned or leased automobiles in January 1986. ...Page 5
- **PENNSYLVANIA BECOMES** 41st state to require young children and infants to ride protected by safety belts or child restraints. ...Page 5
- **TRUCKS AND BUSES:** Congress may enact new safety regulations for the trucking and busing industries before adjourning this summer. ...Page 6
- **HOUSE COMMITTEE** releases a comprehensive report strongly critical of the government's safety regulation of the motor carrier industry. ...Page 6

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