

VW Seeks Belt OK

DOT Still Indecisive On Passives

Editors Note: *This issue of Status Report is devoted entirely to the subject of active and passive occupant restraints. It provides a review of developments during the 18 months that have lapsed since a federal court in Cincinnati told the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to revise its passive restraint regulation.*

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has proposed a change in its passive restraint standard (FMVSS 208) that would allow auto makers to put passive belt systems in 1975 model cars. Volkswagen had requested the change.

The proposal is the only recent NHTSA action on the controversial passive restraint standard, which calls for passive protection in all 1976 model automobiles. The future of the rule was thrown into doubt by a federal court decision in December, 1972, and NHTSA says it has not decided whether to go forward with the deadline. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 23, Dec. 18, 1972.)

During the past 14 months, auto makers, a major insurance company and a public interest body have all urged NHTSA to make up its mind about the standard. NHTSA Administrator James B. Gregory has said on several occasions that he is "reviewing all of the relevant materials. . . . The future occupant crash protection program and its timetable are being considered with the obvious priority they merit."

Under the present standard, which applies only to 1974 and 1975 model cars, manufacturers may meet requirements for protection of front seat occupants with one of three options:

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Option One: Sole use of passive restraints;

Option Two: Passive restraints augmented by lap belts;

Option Three: Belts with inertia reel retractors used in conjunction with ignition interlocks and a buzzer warning system.

Lap belt protection is required for rear seat passengers under all options.

Crash testing requirements vary with each option. Volkswagen's passive belt system qualified under option two, after NHTSA allowed the passive belt to take the place of the lap belts required in that option. The VW system could not qualify under option one since it did not meet the protection standards for a lateral moving barrier crash because of "vehicle structural and interior design," the VW petition stated.

GM OFFERING AIR BAGS

On 1974 model cars, General Motors' limited offering of air bag equipped full-size cars is the only alternative to ignition interlock models aside from temporary exemptions for very small production specialty cars. As of Jan. 31, 1974, GM had manufactured 1,200 air bag equipped Oldsmobiles and Buicks and sold 300, according to an NHTSA spokesman.

The air bags are also to be offered on Cadillacs but these are not yet on the market because test results were "on the edge" in one area, according to a GM spokesman. The Cadillacs should be available shortly and a national newspaper advertisement campaign will then begin, the GM official said. At present, the only advertising, apart from dealer publicity packages for the GM air bag cars, is being sponsored by Allstate Insurance Co.

An NHTSA official said that GM had not formally notified them of any test problem. Under the law manufacturers themselves are responsible for certifying that their vehicles meet the standard, and for reporting instances of non-compliance.

GM's original plans were to offer 100,000 air bag models in 1974 and one million in 1975. In August last year, GM announced it was cutting production plans to 50,000 in 1974 and 100,000 in 1975. These are still the official figures but a GM spokesman acknowledged that it is unlikely the number produced will be near these figures.

'IN WRONG CARS'

"Unfortunately these bags are in the wrong cars," another GM spokesman said. Sales and production of GM full-size cars have been sharply curtailed in favor of smaller models as a result of changing buying trends in the energy shortage.

GM has blamed NHTSA for the cut in planned air bag production. Last August, GM President Edward N. Cole wrote Transportation Secretary Claude Brinegar, "We cannot justify the expenditure in the area of \$200 million for fully-automated tools and facilities" until GM knows whether a passive restraint system would be mandatory or optional in 1976 and beyond.

The court decision that threw doubt on NHTSA's proposed standard was the result of a suit brought by the major U.S. and foreign auto makers, with the exception of GM, to defeat or delay the safety administration's rule.

The court upheld the agency's power to issue such a rule but questioned several aspects of the regulation. It required new test dummy specifications that would not eliminate from the market sports cars and convertibles, and a "reasonable time" for auto makers to satisfy the changed requirements. An NHTSA official said at the time that it was "unlikely" that the court would consider the 1976 model deadline a "reasonable date."

NHTSA issued interim requirements adopting the GM Hybrid II test dummy, effective Aug. 1, 1973, in time for GM to offer air bags on some 1974 models, though not in time for the beginning of the model year. GM claimed NHTSA's delay was the reason for the cut in 1974 production plans.

Although GM is the only auto maker offering air bags to the public, its enthusiasm for the passive restraint system seems to have cooled in the past year. While Cole was attributing the cut in 1975 production to NHTSA delay in issuing a post-1975 rule, GM safety engineers were asking NHTSA to wait until "actual field experience" was available. In a report presented to NHTSA in October, 1973, they claimed that satisfactory evaluation of the air bag experience would require two years of field accident observations "based on an introduction rate of 100,000 vehicles a year." Under GM's present official production plans and assuming that no other manufacturer offers air bags, that experience would not be available until the end of the 1976 model year.

REQUESTS FOR NHTSA ACTION

In a petition for rulemaking, submitted Oct. 31, 1973, Volvo also expressed concern over NHTSA's continuing delay in issuing a revised standard. Volvo representative Donald Taylor wrote Administrator Gregory that Volvo has "several development programs underway, both in active and passive restraint systems."

Uncertainty over the revised standard "has kept us from making crucial decisions in regard to these programs and, in many cases, has made it necessary for us to commit considerable resources to program areas that may ultimately be discarded," he wrote.

Taylor urged a decision by Dec. 1, 1973, in time for decisions on design changes in 1976 models.

Allstate Insurance Co. Vice President Donald L. Schaffer wrote Transportation Secretary Brinegar in September last year, asking for rapid NHTSA action on the passive restraint standard. Schaffer repeated his request to Gregory, writing, "Front seat air bags should be required on all automobiles sold in this country." Schaffer announced Allstate's decision to allow a 30 per cent discount on personal injury or medical payment coverage for 1974 air bag equipped cars.

In an October 31 reply, Gregory said he was working on the timetable for future standards and welcomed the Allstate action.

Center for Auto Safety Director Lowell Dodge and Bernard O'Meara submitted a petition for rulemaking in October. They wrote Gregory in November, 1973, urging that NHTSA "set an early deadline for mandatory passive restraints for front seat protection." This would be even more important, they said, if surveys of safety belt usage with the ignition interlock revealed usage rates below the 80-85 per cent forecast by former Administrator Douglas Toms.

Air Bags: Years Of Deployment And Delay

This chronology lists major air bag related events that have occurred since *Status Report* last took an overview of air bag and other passive restraint developments. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 5, March 13, 1972.) A complete chronology is available from the Institute.

- May 23, 1972 Air bag fails in demonstration for press, sponsored by National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council.
- June 2, 1972 Eaton Corporation advises Council that the test was conducted with "obsolete . . . left-over elements."
- June, 1972 Field testing initiated with 1972 Mercurys equipped with air bag systems. (Total Mercurys equipped to date including government and private fleet vehicles: 831. Total mileage: 25.8 million miles. Later augmented by 1,000 1973 Chevrolets, logging 26.5 million miles to date.)
- Oct. 9, 1972 **Santa Barbara, Calif.: Air bag successfully deploys.** Frontal crash, 15-20 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. In collision with garbage truck, Mercury's air bag deploys in right front passenger space, unoccupied. Driver wearing lap belt, slightly injured.
- Dec. 5, 1972 U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit sends passive restraint standard back to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, ordering the federal agency to revise test specifications, and amend rules so it does not eliminate convertibles and sports cars.
- Dec. 2, 1972 **Cleveland, Ohio: Air bag fails to deploy.** Driver slightly injured. Investigators conclude insufficient change in momentum present to trigger air bag due to nature of crash, despite extensive damage to car.
- Dec. 29-30, 1972 Southfield, Mich.: Professional stuntman and model deliberately crash air bag equipped cars at nearly 25 m.p.h. into concrete barrier with no ill effects in demonstration at Eaton Corp.
- Feb. 7, 1973 **Los Angeles, Calif.: Air bag successfully deploys.** Right frontal crash 15-20 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. Mercury equipped with air bag in front right passenger position collides with MG sports car. Driver (belted) sustains minor injuries. Right front passenger (belted) no injuries. Sports car driver (unrestrained) minor injuries.
- Feb. 20, 1973 **Arlington Heights, Ill.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal crash, 35 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. Mercury hits parked police car at a speed clocked by radar at 68 m.p.h. Driver, otherwise unrestrained, suffers minor injuries. Occupant of parked car suffers major injuries.
- Mar. 18, 1973 NHTSA publishes proposal for new test-dummy specifications, designed to overcome objections of federal court ruling.
- April 5, 1973 **Frederick, Md.: Air bag successfully deploys.** Left lateral sideswipe, 15 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. School bus sideswipes Mercury, sending car into curb.

Driver, otherwise unrestrained, sustained minor injuries. School bus driver, unrestrained, minor injuries.

- April 21, 1973** **Washington, D.C.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Left frontal sideswipe, 15 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. U.S. Park Police vehicle struck, driver virtually uninjured. Driver of other vehicle uninjured.
- May 16, 1973** **Schererville, Ind.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal 15-20 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Driver suffers minor injuries in the crash with a van and a pickup truck. The other drivers suffer minor injuries. Unrestrained infant, evidently not contacted by air bag during impact, dies in crash.
- June 8, 1973** **Valley Park, Mo.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Multiple impact, 30-40 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Teenage driver apparently loses control of the vehicle at a railroad crossing, hits roadside hazard and a ditch. Driver bruises nose, passenger sustains no injuries.
- June 14, 1973** **Lowell, Mass.: Inadvertent deployment.** "An air cushion Chevrolet was traveling on a smooth paved roadway at approximately 30 m.p.h. when the passenger air cushion deployed. The driver had no apparent problem in maintaining control of the vehicle. The right front passenger sustained a hairline fracture and dislocation of her left thumb. Neither occupant suffered any hearing impairment due to bag deployment. Cause of actuation has not yet been determined by GM," according to NHTSA.
- June 17, 1973** **Cheltenham, Pa.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal rollover 20-25 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Car leaps safety island, overturns. Passenger, reportedly wearing lap belt, sustains minor bruises.
- June 22, 1973** **Homewood, Ala.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Left front 20-25 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Air bag equipped Chevrolet leaves road and strikes trees. Driver sustains very minor injuries.
- June 22, 1973** General Motors' President Edward Cole writes Transportation Secretary Claude Brinegar, warning of delays in large scale plans to equip cars with air bags.
- July 9, 1973** **Detroit, Mich.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal, 12-18 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed. Chevrolet hits rear of parked Buick. Driver reports very minor injuries.
- July 13, 1973** **Washington, D.C.: Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal, 12-18 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. U.S. Park Police cruiser strikes rear of Oldsmobile. Driver and right front passenger in park police Chevrolet sustain minor injuries. Driver of struck car uninjured, passengers report minor injuries.
- July 27, 1973** **Gaylord, Mich.: Air bags successfully deploy.** 12-15 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Air bag equipped Chevrolet sedan head-ons Chevrolet station wagon. Three occupants in front seat of sedan essentially uninjured. Minor injuries reported for back seat passengers in sedan and driver and rear seat passengers in wagon.
- Aug. 1, 1973** Effective date for new NHTSA regulation on test dummies.

- Aug. 1, 1973 General Motors tells Congressional hearing GM will offer air bags as options on luxury cars around the first of the year.
- Aug. 1, 1973 Allstate Insurance Co. testifies that GM study favoring lap-shoulder belt systems over air bags in reducing fatal injuries "must be disregarded" because of its basic approach and unrepresentative sample.
- Aug. 10, 1973 General Motors' President Ed Cole writes Transportation Secretary Claude Brinegar cutting planned production of air bag equipped cars from more than 1,000,000 to no more than 150,000 blaming DOT standard-making procedures and GM tooling problems.
- Sept. 17, 1973 Decatur, Ala.: **Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal, 12-15 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Driver of air-bag equipped Chevrolet sustains minor injuries. Minor injuries to occupants of other car.
- Oct. 16, 1973 Allstate Insurance Co. announces a 30 per cent discount on medical and no-fault personal injury coverage for cars with air bags.
- Oct. 29, 1973 Cleveland, Ohio: **Air bag successfully deploys.** Frontal, 25-30 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Mercury with air bag only in right front passenger position goes out of control on sharp curve, hitting a tree. Neither the 18-year-old driver nor his 18-year-old companion wearing available lap or shoulder belts. Driver slightly injured. Passenger uninjured.
- Nov. 6, 1973 Globe, Ariz.: **Air bag successfully deploys.** Frontal 25-30 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Mercury with bag in right front passenger position strikes bull on open highway. Driver, restrained by lap and shoulder belts, suffers minor injuries.
- Dec. 21, 1973 Richmond, Ind.: **Air bags successfully deploy.** Chevrolet crossing railroad tracks at moderate speed snags the undercarriage, causing deployment, with minor injury to driver.
- Jan. 29, 1974 Fulshear, Tex.: **Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal, 20-30 m.p.h. equivalent barrier speed crash. Chevrolet hits bull on highway. Driver sustains sore thumb.
- Feb. 8, 1974 Schiller Park, Ill.: **Air bags successfully deploy.** Frontal 50 m.p.h. estimated closing speed. First crash of privately owned air bag equipped car. Lap-belted driver and right front seat passenger of 1974 model air-bag equipped Oldsmobile uninjured. Unbelted driver of Chevrolet Impala hospitalized with concussion and other injuries.
- Feb. 15, 1974 Milford, Mich.: **Air bags successfully deploy.** Front-to-side crash between air bag equipped Chevrolet and Nova. Nova driver sustains head injuries. Chevrolet driver uninjured.
- Feb. 15, 1974 NHTSA announces modification of passive requirements to permit introduction of passive belt system.

The following editorial first appeared in the NEWSLETTER of the American College of Preventive Medicine, Vol. XV, No. 2, 1974, it will be published, with references, in the April, 1974, issue of The Journal of Trauma.

Strategy In Preventive Medicine:

Passive vs. Active Approaches To Reducing Human Wastage

This note is an invited comment on the notion of "passive" as opposed to "active" approaches in preventive medicine and public health.

I coined the terms early in 1961, and described the distinction later that year in two papers, one with James L. Goddard as co-author. I picked these terms to have labels — perhaps handles would be more accurate — for the opposite poles of what continues to seem to me a broadly useful distinction concerning strategies to reduce various types of human or other wastage. Simply stated, such strategies distribute along a dimension defined in terms of action on the part of individuals in the general population required for their efficacy.

At one extreme are such "active" measures as: boiling water during a flood; slapping mosquitoes in a malarious region; fastening seat belts; taking "the pill"; and wearing helmets, lead aprons, shin guards, condoms, diaphragms, and other protective "barriers."

At the other extreme are such "passive" measures as: pasteurizing milk; controlling screw-worm damage by inundating the wild population with sterilized individuals; fluoridation and chlorination of water, and iodination of salt; enriching foods; providing electrical systems with fuses and insulation; prevention of release of pollutants into air, water, or food; and equipping of motor vehicles with energy-absorbing steering assemblies, air bags, and other passive, deceleration-attenuating devices.

In between the extremes are distributed measures that require some action by individuals in the general population. Thus, vaccines that require more than one shot for protection initially, or for maintenance, are closer to the active extreme than those, such as for yellow fever, that do not.

These distinctions are not merely classificatory niceties. They have direct, practical

relevance. Reducing human wastage through active as opposed to passive tactics typically involves differences in the types and numbers of individuals whose cooperation must be achieved and in the approaches employed, for example private individuals versus members of the relevant power structures. This is well illustrated, on the one hand, by attenuating potentially damaging energy transfers in vehicle crashes through belt use, an active approach requiring for complete success billions of individual actions per month by all sorts of people, in all sorts of mental and physiological states. On the other hand, the universal provision of air bags to achieve the same purpose would require only a behavior change, a simple binding decision, by one federal official or by some three or four executives of motor vehicle manufacturing companies.

Historically, adequate success through active approaches has been rare, and requires exceptionally broad understanding and strong motivation on the part of those involved. In sharp contrast, passive approaches, when available, and once initiated, have a spectacularly more successful record. Consequently, in situations where a passive approach is feasible, available, and known to work well, professional, humane, and responsible decision-making mandates its adoption. This is the case for the placing of air bags in future vehicles. When no adequately passive approach is available, but only an efficacious active one insufficiently used, it should be mandated. This is the case for requiring belt use in vehicles already produced. The two approaches are compatible and complementary. The continued toll of men, women, and children whose injuries in highway crashes would be lessened or eliminated by these now well-proven approaches cries for the implementation of both. Surely as a nation we can find the necessary moral strength and guts for the decision these two steps require.

William Haddon, Jr., M.D.

February 21, 1974

Limited Effectiveness Of Safety Belts Cited

Improved restraint systems, such as air bags and inflatable belts, "must be implemented at the earliest possible date" in order to deal with the long-term vehicle occupant casualty problem, a former National Highway Traffic Safety Administration official said recently. Widespread use of safety belts is the only immediate means of reducing injuries but the effect will be limited and inadequate, he said.

In a paper delivered at a recent meeting of the American Association of Automotive Medicine, Dr. Charles Y. Warner, formerly acting chief of NHTSA's Office of Crashworthiness, Driver/Passenger Protection Division, argued the immediate need for "improved restraint systems and structural improvements." Warner's paper was based on studies he conducted with three associates while at NHTSA. Warner left the agency in July, 1973, to return to Brigham Young University.

In his paper, Warner examined recently released data on highway casualties in Australia, where safety belt usage laws were in effect in all states by 1972. He calculated that if similar laws were enacted in the United States, the reduction in deaths might be less than the 10-15,000 commonly forecast. In the United States, highway casualties occur in rural as opposed to urban areas in much higher proportions than in Australia, he said. The Australian experience showed that safety belt usage was significantly lower in rural than in urban areas, with a correspondingly smaller reduction in deaths and injuries.

"Belt restraint systems have proven effective," Warner said, in increasing chances of survival and preventing injuries. They are most effective in "low-to-moderate crash severities" while their effectiveness is limited in severe frontal crashes, Warner asserted.

Studies of crash data show that almost half of all fatalities occur in crashes that are mainly frontal, Warner claimed. He cited studies showing that the median fatal frontal crash in this country is more severe than 30 miles per hour.

NHTSA Squelches Controversial Air Bag Paper

A paper on passive restraint effectiveness, scheduled to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Automotive Medicine as a companion to Warner's paper on belt restraints, was withdrawn by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The author, Dr. August Burgett, of NHTSA's Office of Crashworthiness, told *Status Report* the paper was "withdrawn and not presented for internal reasons." When asked for a copy, Burgett said, "It is not an accomplished fact . . . the paper doesn't exist."

In explanation of the withdrawal, NHTSA Administrator James B. Gregory wrote Dr. James Weygandt, past president of the AAAM, saying that because NHTSA regulations "have ramifications throughout society" this "places restrictions on public discussions . . . Upon reviewing the material contained in the paper by Dr. Burgett, it was felt that it could possibly be construed as a statement of policy in a current rulemaking activity."

The paper was withdrawn to prevent difficulties from "such an inference of policy," he said.

“Except for the prevention of total ejection, belt systems *per se* seem to offer only limited protection” in crashes other than frontal collision, Warner said. Moreover, he pointed out, ejection can be prevented by “rational design without great expense and without enforced involuntary belt use.” Total ejection of unbelted occupants in recent model year cars occurs only one-fourth as often as in cars built 15 years earlier, he claimed.

Although Warner advocated widespread use of available restraints, such as the lap-shoulder belts, as “the only feasible short-term solution” for reducing occupant injuries, he cautioned that the effect will be “limited and insufficient.” He drew attention to projections of future transportation trends suggesting “dramatic increases in small-car use and significant annual casualty increases.” Air cushions and inflatable belts, he contended, offer the promise of an effective long-term means of reducing occupant deaths and injuries.

Belt Occupant Restraint Effectiveness will be published in the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Conference, American Association for Automotive Medicine. Orders should be placed with Donald F. Huelke, Director of Publications, AAAM, Department of Anatomy, 4818 Medical Science II, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

Australian Research Shows Spinal Cord Injuries Drop

Australian research indicates that the frequency and severity of spinal cord injuries in auto crashes have declined in that country since safety belt use became compulsory. Australian fatality decreases associated with belt use laws had been reported earlier. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 11, June, 12, 1972.)

In a paper published in the October, 1973, issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Dr. David C. Burke, medical director of a spinal injuries unit in a Melbourne hospital, wrote that during the two years after safety belt use became compulsory in the state of Victoria, 27 per cent fewer patients were treated for spinal cord injuries than in the two years immediately preceding their mandated use. The injuries of those treated during the latter two-year period were generally less severe than those who were treated before belt use became compulsory.

Burke said that his spinal injuries unit treated 60 patients in 1969 and 1970. In 1971, the year belt laws went into effect, and 1972 Burke's unit treated a total of 42 patients.

In 1969 and 1970, the unit treated 17 complete paraplegics. During the two “seat belt years,” only five were treated. “The percentage of known non-belt wearers with complete neurological lesions is 50 per cent, compared with 17 per cent for belt wearers,” Burke reported.

Burke said that prior to the legislation, “The most striking factor that kept recurring in accident after accident was the very large percentage of patients who were not wearing seat belts at the time of the accident....The incidence of the wearing of seat belts only increased slowly until the Victoria State legislation in November, 1970, which compelled all occupants of motor vehicles to wear their seat belts, if these were fitted to the car, as from Jan. 1, 1971.”

He said, “The apparent fall in the admission rate of car occupants (with spinal cord injuries) is therefore very suggestive of a real effect, as it occurred incidentally at a time of an increasing number of motor vehicles on the road, a fact which could reasonably be expected to increase the rate of car accidents, and therefore of injuries.”

Reprints of the paper are available from Dr. D. C. Burke, Medical Director, Spinal Injuries Unit, Austin Hospital, Heidelberg, Victoria, 3084, Australia.

Safety Group Scores Belt Accessibility

The Center for Auto Safety wants the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require that all new passenger vehicles, including taxi cabs, be equipped with safety belts that will be readily available for those who wish to use them.

Data in a petition filed by the center shows that in New York City alone, during 1971, 68 taxi cab occupants were killed, and 13,559 injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

The petition claims that persons in rear seats of passenger cars "all too frequently . . . have to fight to find the belts, which because of design negligence on the part of manufacturers, can become wedged behind the seat."

Specifically, the center has asked NHTSA to amend the current Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 208 — which sets down occupant protection requirements for both active and passive restraint systems — to require that all safety belts "installed at designated seating positions in passenger vehicles, including those intended for use as taxis, shall be accessible to, and operable by, passengers whenever such designated seating positions — front or rear — are occupied."

—Taxi Belt Shortage

IHS conducted surveys in New York City and Washington, D.C. to determine if randomly selected cabs had seat belts visible and available to rear seat passengers. The results:

- In New York City, 42 out of 49 surveyed cabs did not have safety belts visible and available to rear seat passengers.

- In Washington, D.C. 18 out of 20 surveyed cabs did not have the belts visible and available to rear seat passengers.

According to the center, the performance criteria of its proposed standard could be met with a three-point retractable system such as that found in taxi cabs presently operating in Australia, or with a lap belt covered by a molded stiff sheathing, such as is already in use in the front outboard seats of some cars. The sheathing keeps the seat belts from being inaccessible or inoperable.

To alleviate the problem in cabs already in service, the center's petition calls for enactment by local jurisdictions of regulations requiring cab drivers to maintain belts in usable order as a condition for operating a cab.

The transportation committee of the District of Columbia's City Council recently held hearings into whether the wearing of safety belts by car occupants should be made mandatory. The only opposition to the bill came in testimony from a representative of the district's Taxicab Industry Group who claimed that the "hardship imposed on both the driver and the riding public from the use of these belts would render negligible any good that might be derived from their use in the city where our speed limit is only 25 miles per hour."

Ford, GM Report On New Car Belt Use

Two major auto makers have reported that driver safety belt use in 1974 model cars is above 50 per cent.

GM said that 55 per cent of the drivers and 48 per cent of the right front passengers in all 1974 models were wearing their shoulder belts. Ford said its survey found "that 63 per cent of drivers and 53 per cent of right front passengers were wearing both lap and shoulder belts."

Although the two auto makers reported that belt use is greater in 1974 model cars than in earlier model cars, Ford found at the time of its survey that 37 per cent of 1974 model car drivers had learned to defeat the interlock system or wear their belt improperly, i.e., the driver had his shoulder belt under his arm or behind his back, or the shoulder portion of the belt had been removed. GM reported that 45 per cent of the drivers observed in its 1974 model cars were either not wearing their belts or wearing them improperly. The auto maker said that "usage rates could be higher if 'lap belt only usage' was included."

Ford's 729 observations were made as owners arrived at survey sites "for a personal interview about their new car." GM surveyed 1,715 cars at suburban shopping centers, expressway exits, tunnel and bridge approaches, car parking structures and city street intersections.

The two auto makers said their studies are preliminary. GM said in a letter to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that "a more representative cross section of observed vehicles is necessary to obtain a more accurate national usage rate." Ford said it plans to extend its survey "to determine how usage rates hold up on Ford-made products after a longer period of ownership."

Dual Standard For Belts, Bags Rapped

The Center for Auto Safety has criticized the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for applying different test criteria to safety belts than those applied to passive restraints.

In a paper by staff member Ivan Tether, the center points out that NHTSA's test requirements for safety belts under FMVSS No. 209 "are requirements for webbing width, strength and elongation," which are met by "static, as opposed to dynamic, testing which consists of little more than hanging a weight on the end of a belt and seeing if it fails."

While the belt-test requirements are "thus very minimal in terms of protecting an occupant from injury in the event of a crash," the paper says, NHTSA requires that air bags "undergo dynamic testing -- in simulated or actual crash conditions -- for example, 30 miles per hour into a fixed barrier While it is obviously desirable that belts not break under given stresses, it is obviously much more desirable that an occupant protection system guarantee actual protection up to tested limits.

"The current standard for belts utterly fails to guarantee such protection."

Further information on the paper, entitled, *History of the Air Bag and Modified Standard 208: The Long (And Unfinished) Road to Universal Passive Protection of America's Motorists*, are available from the Center for Auto Safety, 1223 Dupont Circle Building, Washington, D.C. 20036.

the highway
loss reduction

STATUS REPORT

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