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Seat Belt Use by Drivers, Passengers Reaches 75 percent

**By Rae Tyson,
Office of Communications and
Consumer Information**

September 9, 2002. Seat belt use is continuing an upward trend in 2002, reaching 75 percent, its highest level since national surveys began in 1994, announced NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge at a meeting of the Governors Highway Safety Association in St. Louis.

States with primary seat belt laws hit another milestone—80 percent belt use—while states with secondary laws averaged 69 percent. In states with a primary seat belt law, motor vehicle occupants can be stopped and cited by law enforcement officials for failing to wear belts whether or not another violation has occurred. In states with secondary enforcement, the vehicle must be stopped for another offense before the occupant can be cited for failing to wear a belt.

“Though we can’t rest until seat belt use is 100 percent in this country, I am nevertheless pleased that we’ve reached another milestone,” said Dr. Runge. “More and more, people are realizing that seat belts are absolutely the most effective safety device in a car. The Bush Administration is committed to a seat belt use goal of 78 percent by 2003.”

The new data—drawn from a large-scale observational study conducted by NHTSA in June 2002—show a 2 percentage-point increase in seat belt use to 75 percent since 2001. The study, known as the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS), is conducted periodically by the agency to obtain nationwide estimates of shoulder belt use and motorcycle helmet use to support the agency’s occupant protection programs. The last such survey was conducted in June 2001.

A 2-percentage point increase in belt use translates into an additional 6 million users. An estimated 500 lives per year will be saved as a result of the increase.

Some of the strongest gains in seat belt use were in the states participating in the nationwide “Click It or Ticket” enforcement campaign around the Memorial Day holiday.

A total of 30 states participated in the campaign.

The Northeast—historically the lowest
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Well-Attended News Conference Formally Heralds New LATCH Requirements

**By Alexander (Sandy) Sinclair,
Office of Communications
and Consumer Information**

August 28, 2002. Washington, DC. With the deadline for a new federal regulation mandating the LATCH child safety seat system four days away, NHTSA joined with leaders in the

private and public sectors on August 28 at a news conference that garnered extensive nationwide publicity and informed consumers about the new system.

LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children, a system mandated by the Federal government to standardize and
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NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge and CEO, Chrysler Group, Dr. Dieter Zetsche demonstrate the LATCH child safety seat system.

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simplify the installation of child restraints without using the vehicle's seat belt system. New vehicles and child safety seats manufactured on and after September 1, 2002 will be equipped with the LATCH system.

Joining NHTSA at the event were representatives of the Chrysler Group, Toys "R" Us/Babies "R" Us, Graco Children's Products, Lamaze International and the National Safety Council. These groups are all partners, along with NHTSA, in SEATCHECK—a new free child safety seat inspection service sponsored by DaimlerChrysler.

The event, which was held at the DOT Plaza, generated widespread media coverage over the Labor Day holiday weekend in the days leading up to September 1, including all morning network television news shows, such as *CNN Live*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show* and *CBS This Morning*.

NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D. and Dr. Dieter Zetsche, CEO of Chrysler Group, were interviewed extensively by these and other media outlets and conducted repeated LATCH installation demonstrations.

Preliminary results indicate tremendous media penetration regarding LATCH:

- An estimated 108.5 million media impressions were generated;
- More than 20,500 radio stories aired, reaching an estimated 42.7 million listeners;
- Visits to the SEATCHECK Web site jumped from 16,000 on August 27 to 169,000 on August 28—the day the press conference was held—for a total of more than 490,000 "Web hits" in August alone;

- 554 television news stories aired, including most major media markets; and
- 22 stories appeared in major national daily newspapers and most major wire services, including the Associated Press, Cox, Reuters and United Press International. The



All morning television news shows covered the event, indicating a high level of media interest in the LATCH system.

AP story in particular generated broad coverage in local daily and weekly newspapers and on Internet-based news services as well.

According to the recently released 2001 FARS statistics, the number of fatalities for children under five dropped significantly from the 2000 figure—by 8.6 percent. 710 children died in 2000 compared to 649 in 2001. The number of fatalities for children ages five to 15 also dropped 8.6 percent from 2,121 in 2000 to 1,939 in 2001. The number of fatalities in both age groups is the lowest since FARS record keeping began in 1975.

At the same time, however, NHTSA

estimates that 4 out of 5 child safety seats are installed incorrectly (and far higher misuse rates are consistently observed at local child safety seat inspection events). Once the LATCH system is completely phased in, NHTSA estimates that as many as 50 child fatalities and 3,000 injuries will be prevented each year, and that as much as half of the misuse associated with the improper installation of child safety seats will be eliminated.

Over the past several months, NHTSA consulted with its private industry partners (child safety seat manufacturers, automakers and child safety seat retailers) and its many partners in the public safety and not-for-profit communities to develop consumer education materials about LATCH. These materials and a series of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are available at the NHTSA website and have been provided to NHTSA Regional Offices.

The core messages for consumers that are emphasized in these materials, and which were articulated by Dr. Runge in his many interviews about LATCH, are the following:

- **LATCH will make it easier to secure your child's seat correctly.** If you have a vehicle that is equipped with LATCH, and a LATCH-equipped child safety seat, use them at all times according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- **If your vehicle does not have LATCH, however, or if you have a non-LATCH child safety seat, your current child safety seat is still safe to use** and you should continue to buckle up your child in that seat **every trip, every time**. As always, your seat is safe to use if it is installed correctly, has not been involved in a crash or otherwise been damaged, and has not been recalled by the manufacturer.
- **We encourage parents and caregivers to continue to have their safety seats inspected to ensure that they are installed correctly.** Even though LATCH will become widespread over time, and will be the rule rather than the exception, for the foreseeable future, inspections remain a vital component in our child passenger safety efforts. The new SEATCHECK service enables consumers to identify trained personnel at child safety seat inspection stations in their areas to inspect their seats and to make sure they have been installed correctly. This information is drawn directly from NHTSA's inspection station database. To access SEATCHECK, call 1-866-SEATCHECK or visit www.seatcheck.org.

Thanks to the great team effort of a host of individuals and offices from across the agency—and the dedicated efforts of our partners in the public and private sectors—consumers are in a strong position to properly use the new LATCH system and to ensure that their children ride correctly restrained—every trip, every time. ■

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region for seat belt use—showed the largest gain, up 8 percentage points between 2001 and 2002. But drivers and passengers in the West still buckle up at the highest rate nationwide—79 percent.

Though more pickup truck occupants are buckling up—a 3-percentage-point increase—they still have the lowest percentage of all vehicles—65 percent. Belt use among sport utility vehicle (SUV) and van occupants rose from 75 percent in 2001 to 79 percent in 2002.

Besides indicating a 2-percentage-point increase in overall seat belt use, the latest national seat belt use survey shows that:

- Seat belt use rates in the South (76 percent), West (79 percent) and Midwest (74 percent) are statistically similar, while the Northeast

continues to lag behind (69 percent).

- Helmet use among motorcycle riders nationwide dropped sharply from 71 percent to 58 percent.
- The last helmet survey was done in the fall of 2000.

The latest NOPUS estimates were derived from a survey conducted during a three-week period in June 2002. A total of 150,000 vehicles and 900 motorcycles were observed for seat belt and helmet use at 2,000 roadway and intersection sites throughout the country. The margin of error for NOPUS is 2.4 percentage points.

The newly released NHTSA statistics are in a research note on the agency's Website at: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/NCSA. ■

NHTSA Employee Saves Three Lives; Local Volunteer Firefighter Makes a Difference in his Community

By David Bryson,
Program Development and Delivery

On Sunday evening, September 8, while most NHTSA employees were spending time with their families and friends or preparing to return to work the next morning, Gamunu Wijetunge of the NHTSA EMS Division saved the lives of three local residents while serving as a volunteer firefighter at the Wheaton (MD) Volunteer Rescue Squad.

Gamunu was assigned to the heavy rescue squad and at 7:00 p.m. they were dispatched to a single vehicle automobile crash. The car struck a pole at a high rate of

speed, entrapping the driver and a front seat passenger. Gamunu and his crew used the "jaws of life", a heavy-duty hydraulic rescue tool, to remove the car's roof and doors and free the injured occupants. The passenger was flown by helicopter to a local trauma center and the driver was transported by ambulance to a local hospital.

While cleaning up the crash scene and preparing to return to the station, Gamunu's unit was dispatched to a house fire a few blocks away. They arrived to find a home with a fire in the basement and smoke throughout the house.

Gamunu went to the rear of the home and found a bystander struggling to remove an

unconscious man through the basement door. He grabbed the man and dragged him away from the burning house and immediately assessed the victim's vital signs. Finding that the victim could not breathe adequately, Gamunu asked the bystander to help him carry the patient to the front of the house to meet the ambulance crew.

Once they met the ambulance crew in the front yard, Gamunu began to assist the patient with his breathing using oxygen. Realizing that this treatment was not enough, Gamunu again picked up the patient and carried him one block to the ambulance. Also trained as a paramedic, Gamunu helped to intubate the patient's airway to provide more life-saving oxygen and started an IV to provide fluids. Gamunu then left the back of the ambulance and returned to the house to help finish fighting the fire.

Another great example of "People Saving People". ■

NHTSA Partners with Jack & Jill of America to Launch the "Habit For Life" Seat Belt Campaign

By Craig Killgo, Jr.,
Office of Program Development and Delivery, Occupant Protection Division

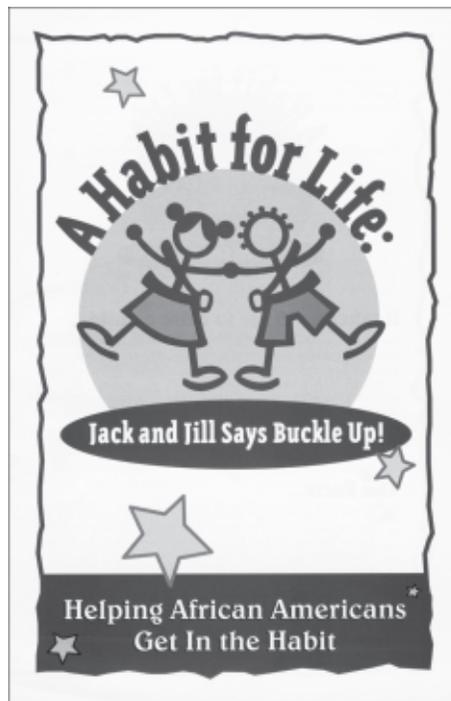
July 14, 2002. Los Angeles, CA. NHTSA and Jack and Jill of America (JJA) unveiled the new national seat belt campaign "A Habit For Life" to help increase below average child seat and seat belt use rates among African American families. JJA's National Program Director conducted two educational sessions during the 38th National convention to help generate support for the upcoming November 2002 mobilization and February 2003.

To help promote the effort JJA will be conducting a mini-grant program that will provide funding to 237 chapters across 37 states. JJA expects participation from each chapter during this November's *America Buckles Up Children: ABC Mobilization* and next February's Child Passenger Safety Week. Each chapter will conduct program activities targeting daycare centers, beauty salons, car washes, and other non-traditional venues that are frequently visited by African American families with small children and teens.

The centerpiece of JJA's 38th National Conference was the "Strap It On" traffic safety forum conducted by Jay Cooper, also host of Black Entertainment Television's (BET) youth talk show "Teen Summit." The forum engaged more than 300 teens in an educational discussion focusing on the benefits of always buckling up, requirements of the primary seat belt law, appropriate behaviors during traffic stops, and injuries associated with being unrestrained during a traffic crash.

At the conclusion of the summit Jay

Cooper issued a challenge to JJA teens to establish seat belt campaigns in their schools this fall and plan for safe travel during the 2003 prom & graduation season. Some JJA teen chapters have already started to plan for their 2003 prom safety campaigns. BET and NHTSA plan to provide interested groups with a copy of the "Strap It On" traffic safety summit during the early fall of 2002. For more information about the *Habit For Life* or *Strap It On* campaigns contact Craig Killgo Jr, at (202) 366-8933. ■



Buckleupamerica.org: Useful Information, Good Design



NHTSA's Buckle Up America (BUA) website www.buckleupamerica.org was recently selected and recognized by the Canadian Association of Road Safety Professionals as one of three websites for recognition on the basis of posting useful traffic safety information and having good site design. The BUA website won in the international category. The BUA website has been in operation since February 2002 and serves as a resource to NHTSA partners working to increase seat belt and child safety seat use.

Good website design involves combining well-organized, easily accessible information with engaging content and graphics while avoiding clutter and other distracting elements. Graphics should serve to draw interest to specific areas and to provide a more pleasing overall experience for the reader. Kudos to the BUA group for their efforts! ■

NHTSA Wins NCSCJ Judicial Education Award

By Brian Chodrow

August 9, 2002. Washington, DC. The Judicial Division of the American Bar Association and the National Conference of Specialized Court Judges awarded the NCSCJ Judicial Education Award to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration during the Judicial Division's Annual Awards Luncheon on August 9, 2002. The Judicial Education Award is bestowed by the NCSCJ based upon nominations and competitively judged applications from state and federal judicial offices and education providers that have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to promoting nationally based judicial education. The award recognizes sources of funding for judicial education, and honors judicial administrative offices and entities with a proven record of supporting the continuing education needs of judges, and in particular gives tribute to resources that encourage attendance by judges at nationally-based judicial education programs.

The Judicial Education Award recognized NHTSA's substantial financial commitment to providing grants in support of judicial education for all judges involved in hearing traffic safety cases. NHTSA's support for judicial education has been broad-based and reflects a philosophy that recognizes the importance of peer-to-peer education among judges, and the value of creating national forums to facilitate judicial training. Through the Judicial Fellowship Program, NHTSA developed and implemented three national judicial outreach programs, including the "Courage to Live" program, which was developed in cooperation with the National Judicial College, and programs on the use of standardized field sobriety tests and the role of



Pictured from left to right: Hon Robert K. Pirraglia (2001-2002 Judicial Fellow); Hon. Robin D. Smith (2002-2003 Judicial Fellow); Robin Mayer (NOD Division Chief); Karl B. Grube (2000-2001 Judicial Fellow) Brian Chodrow (NHTSA); Steve Smith (Chair-Conf. Of Specialized Court Judges); Jeff Michael (NHTSA).

racial profiling in traffic law enforcement. NHTSA also provided seed grant funding for programs in traffic court technology, and to date has awarded tuition and travel grants for judges from 38 states to attend the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. These grants allowed judges to participate in state-of-the-art, peer-to-peer judicial training programs focusing on state-based traffic adjudication outreach presentations. NHTSA continues to support outreach and judicial education efforts through the funding of the "Highway to Justice" insert found in the ABA Judicial Division's quarterly newsletter. Robin Mayer, head of NHTSA's Office of Communication and Outreach, accepted the award on behalf of NHTSA, during the annual Judicial Division awards luncheon, at the Mayflower Hotel, in Washington D.C. ■

9/11 Hero: Susan McHenry

At the DOT September 11th Remembrance Ceremony held in the plaza, our very own Susan McHenry of Program Development and Delivery was awarded the Secretary's 9/11 Medal in recognition of her outstanding commitment and effort to volunteer her time to help run the Department's Crisis Management Center (CMC) after the horrific attacks on America on September 11, 2001.

Secretary Mineta and Deputy Secretary

Michael Jackson presented the beautiful medal to Susan as she was one of only a dozen employees to receive this special award and the only NHTSA employee to do so.

Congratulations, Susan, for receiving this well-deserved award and we cannot thank you enough for your tireless efforts to help us and the rest of America recover from the events of September 11, 2001.

We are very proud of you. ■

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Kathryn Henry
Editor

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Loss of a Giant in the Field of Alcohol and Highway Safety

By Jim Frank,
Office of Impaired Driving



NHTSA is saddened by the loss of Robert F. Borkenstein, Professor Emeritus of Indiana University and retired Indiana State Police Captain. Robert Borkenstein died Aug. 10 at his home in Bloomington, Indiana,

following a long illness. He was 89.

Dr. Borkenstein was a true pioneer in the field of alcohol and highway safety. He is best known for inventing the "Breathalyzer," the first commercially successful breath tester used by police in impaired driving enforcement. The introduction of the Breathalyzer revolutionized DWI enforcement, not only in the United States, but worldwide.

He is also known as the lead researcher in the famous Grand Rapids study, closely associated with his name. This study, completed in the 1960s, was the first large scale epidemiological study to assess the risk of being involved in an alcohol-related crash as a function of the blood alcohol concentration level of a driver. Today, it is viewed as classic research that laid the foundation for so much that has followed in the field of alcohol and highway safety.

Dr. Borkenstein was very active on the Committee on Alcohol and Other Drugs of the National Safety Council, was one of the founding members of the International Council on Alcohol, Drugs and Traffic Safety, and was known to all who worked in the field.

Dr. Borkenstein was based at Indiana University. His name will be perpetuated by the week-long alcohol- and most recently, drug-related courses, called the "Borkenstein courses", being offered twice a year at Indiana University's Center for Studies of Law in Action. Dr. Borkenstein's inventions and contribution to alcohol and highway safety research brought him worldwide acclaim. The field is not often blessed with giants of his caliber. ■

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

It doesn't make any difference whether what you face is something that affects your work, your personal relationships, your sense of security, your appraisal of self-worth, or your appearance—the way you think about your situation largely determines whether you will do anything about it and what you will do.

—Dr. Arthur Freeman and Rose DeWolf