



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

# NHTSA NOW

Volume 9, No. 6

August 11, 2003

## 2002 Highway Fatalities Highest Since 1990; Injuries Hit an All-Time Low

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

As highway crashes continue to claim the lives of thousands, the grim statistics underscore the need for better state laws, stricter enforcement and safer driving behavior.

Alcohol-related fatalities remained at 41 percent of the total with 17,419 deaths in 2002, up slightly from 17,400 in 2001. Historically, the majority of passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were not wearing safety belts; that trend continued in 2002 with 59 percent unrestrained.

The number of injured dropped from 3.03 million in 2001 to 2.92 million in 2002, a record low, with the largest decrease in injuries among occupants of passenger cars. Among other factors, the decline in injuries can be attributed to tougher federal safety standards and improved vehicle design.

Secretary Norman Y. Mineta emphasized his commitment to safety and personally urged states to pass tough laws prohibiting drunk driving and requiring the use of safety belts.

SAFETEA (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003), the Bush Administration's surface transportation legislative proposal, would provide more than \$15 billion over six years for highway safety programs. This is more than double the amount provided by its predecessor, TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). The majority of this funding would be through a new core highway safety infrastructure program instead of the existing Surface Transportation Program safety set-aside.

In addition, SAFETEA would create a new safety belt incentive program to strongly encourage states to enact primary safety belt laws and achieve substantially higher safety belt use rates. SAFETEA also would combine the several safety programs administered by NHTSA into a consolidated grant program.

Under SAFETEA, states would have broad new flexibility to transfer safety funds among diverse safety programs administered by the Department if they develop performance-based comprehensive strategic highway safety plans that identify their highest priority safety improvements.

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## Region III Kicks Off Checkpoint Strikeforce 2003

**June 27, 2003.** More than 100 law enforcement and highway safety advocates from all over NHTSA Region III came together in Martinsburg West Virginia to kickoff the July impaired driving Crackdown and Regional Checkpoint Strikeforce Campaign. The WV Eastern Panhandle Safe Communities Program sponsored the dinner and press conference. Speakers included Region III Administrator Dr. Elizabeth A. Baker, WV Governors Rep Commissioner Roger Pritt,



*Continued on page 3* Region III Administrator, Dr. Baker, discusses the DUI Crackdown and Checkpoint Strikeforce.

# NHTSA and Motorcycle Industry Working to Decrease Motorcyclist Deaths and Injuries

by Joey Syner, Office of Safety Programs



Pictured from left to right: Roger Hagie, Vice Chair, Kawasaki, Motor Corp. USA; Brian McLaughlin, Senior Associate Administrator for Traffic Injury Control; Lara Lee, Chair, Harley-Davidson Motor Corp; Dr. Jeff Runge, NHTSA Administrator; David Edward, Trustee, Honda Motor Company; Ron Medford, Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety.

On May 30<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Runge voiced NHTSA's continuing support for motorcycle safety at a meeting in Washington D.C. with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Board of Trustees. Brian McLaughlin, Senior Associate Administrator for Traffic Injury Control, and Ron Medford, Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle

Safety, participated in the meeting and represented both the behavioral and vehicular aspects of program support. The meeting's purpose was to identify program activities in which NHTSA and the motorcycle industry can cooperatively work together to decrease motorcyclist crash-related fatalities.

"The Motorcycle Safety Foundation was NHTSA's earliest partner in promoting motorcycle safety and remains an important friend in this effort. Our partnership with MSF has a tremendous impact on motorcycle safety and motorcycling," said Dr. Runge. "While our past collective efforts have helped promote safety, we need to do much more. The recent news has not been so good, so we have to redouble our efforts to reduce the number of motorcyclists who are injured and killed each year in roadway crashes."

Reducing impaired riding was the central theme of the meeting. In 2001, the alcohol-related fatality rate for motorcycle crashes was 22.7 times higher than the rate for all motor vehicles. For motorcycle riders especially, balance, coordination, and judgment are skills crucial to operating a motorcycle safely, and the skills first affected by alcohol use.

The decline in helmet use also was discussed. According to the National Occupant Protection Survey, helmet use has declined 13 percent from 71 percent in 2000 to 58 percent in 2002.

Dr. Runge concluded the meeting by saying, "Our work together has made a difference not only in rider training and licensing, but also in reduced impaired riding, increased motorist awareness, and perhaps most importantly, in setting the agenda for future motorcycle safety initiatives. However, we cannot rest on past successes. We must be our own worst critic and continually strive to raise the bar." ■

## NHTSA Region III Convenes Impaired Driving Summit

By Stephanie Hancock, Region III

**June 11-13, 2003. Fredricksburg, Virginia.** In advance of launching Region III's second year of Checkpoint Strikeforce, in which DC, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia have agreed to conduct, at a minimum, one checkpoint in their state, every week from June 27, 2003 through January 4, 2004, the Region held a summit on impaired driving. State and local law

enforcement, prosecution, adjudication and community traffic safety and highway safety professionals attended.

Topics discussed include Homeland Security and the Traffic Stop; It Takes More than Law Enforcement; Marketing Checkpoint Strikeforce; What's New in DUI Detection Apprehension and Adjudication; and Partnering with Alcohol Beverage Control. ■



NHTSA's Jack Oates dares the audience to "Catch me if you can" and explains the innovative program of the same name designed to motivate law enforcement to go after impaired drivers.

# NHTSA Creates New School Bus Category For Multifunction Transportation Needs

By Tim Hurd, Office of Communications and Consumer Information

**July 29, 2003.** NHTSA today defined a new subcategory of school buses for use in transporting children in trips other than to and from school.

NHTSA's new subcategory, the "multi-function school activity bus" (MFSAB) is defined as a vehicle that is sold for purposes that do not include transportation between home and school for students from kindergarten through Grade 12. Accordingly, these multifunction buses will be exempt from requirements for traffic control equipment requirements when the rule takes effect in 30 days.

This new class of vehicles should serve as a safe choice for companies and institutions that have a need to transport groups of people. A particular safety benefit exists for transporting 12 to 15 passengers, since school buses have a better safety record than 15-passenger vans for this purpose.

"This modification allows institutions to take advantage of the safety benefits associated with school buses, which are by far the safest means of transporting children," said NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge.

Under current federal law, dealers cannot sell a vehicle for the purpose of transporting school-age students to or from school

or related events unless it meets all federal motor vehicle safety standards for school buses. Among those requirements are ones requiring all school buses to be equipped with devices designed to control traffic, including flashing lights and stop arms.

The new multi-function buses will be exempt from the traffic control requirements since they are not intended to be used for picking up or discharging students on public roadways. While the new multi-function buses are exempt from the traffic control requirements, they are required to meet all other school bus safety standards.

NHTSA noted that in June 1999 the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommended that the 50 states and the District of Columbia require that all vehicles carrying more than 10 passengers (buses) and transporting children to and from school and school related activities, including, but not limited to, Head Start programs and day care centers, meet the school bus structural standards and enact regulatory measures to enforce compliance with the revised statutes.

The complete final rule is available at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings> ■

# Checkpoint Strikeforce and DUI Crackdown Kickoff

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Superintendent WV State Police Col. Howard Hill, Local MADD President Mark Cheeseman, and WV Law Enforcement Liaison J.D. Meadows. Eighteen law enforcement agencies from Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia were present. They included state and local police as well as Sheriffs Departments. Representatives from MADD National, WV Governor Wise's office and WV Senator Capito's office were also present. The highlight of the evening ended with all the departments participating in sobriety checkpoints following the kickoff. Several border-to-border checkpoints were conducted at state and local borders with multiple agencies participating. A total of 23 agencies involving more than 120 officers conducted 12 checkpoints. Preliminary numbers show more than 2,500 vehicles checked, 21 DUI arrests, 9 drug arrests and 11 other criminal charges. More border-to-border checkpoints are planned for the next six months during the Region III Checkpoint Strikeforce Campaign. West Virginia also conducted checkpoints along the borders of Pennsylvania, Ohio and Kentucky in conjunction with the crackdown kickoff. ■

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*"The great French Marshall Lyautey once asked his gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for 100 years. The Marshall replied, "In that case, there is not time to lose; plant it this afternoon!"*

— John F. Kennedy

## NHTSA Region V Receives National Sheriff's Association Award



*Pictured from left: George Ferris, NHTSA Region V, accepts an award from the Chairman of the Traffic Safety Committee, Sheriff Dwight Radcliff at the 63<sup>rd</sup> NSA annual conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The award was presented to Donald J. McNamara and staff for their dedication and commitment to traffic safety by achieving One-Hundred percent participation of the Sheriffs in NHTSA's Region V "America Buckles Up Children" mobilization campaign. The 100-Percent states include Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.*

# 2002 Highway Fatalities Highest Since 1990; Injuries Hit an All-Time Low

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“If you drink and drive or fail to wear your safety belt, taking those risks may cost you your life,” said NHTSA Administrator Dr. Jeff Runge. “On the other hand, driving sober and wearing a belt will significantly increase your chance of survival on the highway.”

Though overall fatalities increased to 42,815 in 2002 from 42,196 in 2001, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) remained at 1.51, a historic low. According to Federal Highway Administration estimates, VMT increased in 2002 to 2.83 trillion, up from 2.78 trillion in 2001.

NHTSA earlier estimated that highway crashes cost society \$230.6 billion a year, about \$820 per person.

Fatalities in rollover crashes accounted for 82 percent of the total fatality increase in 2002. In 2002, 10,666 people died in rollover crashes, up 5 percent from 10,157 in 2001. The number of persons killed in sport utility vehicles (SUVs) that rolled over rose 14 percent. Sixty-one percent of all SUV fatalities involved rollovers.

NHTSA’s Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) also shows that, in 2002:

- Motorcycle fatalities increased for the fifth year in a row following years of steady improvement. A total of 3,244 riders died, up slightly from 3,197 in 2001. It was the smallest increase in motorcycle fatalities in five years.

However, deaths among riders 50 and over increased 26 percent.

- Alcohol-related fatalities have been rising steadily since 1999. However, deaths in low alcohol-involvement crashes (.01-.07 blood alcohol concentration (BAC)) dropped 5.5 percent from 2001 to 2,401 deaths.
- Fatalities from large truck crashes dropped from 5,111 in 2001 to 4,897 in 2002, a 4.2 percent decline.
- Fatalities among children seven and under dropped to historic low levels. In 2002, 968 children seven and under were killed, down from 1,059 in 2001.
- Pedestrian deaths also declined, to 4,808, a 1.9 percent drop from 2001.
- In fatal crashes between passenger cars and LTVs (light trucks and vans, a category that includes SUVs), the occupants of the car were more often fatally injured. When a car was struck in the side by an LTV, the fatality was 20.8 times more likely to have been in the passenger car. In a head-on collision between a car and an LTV, the fatality was 3.3 times more likely to be among car occupants.

NHTSA annually collects crash statistics from 50 states and the District of Columbia to produce the annual report on traffic fatality trends. Summaries of the FARS report are available on the NHTSA website at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/Rpts/2003/Assess02.pdf> ■

# Congratulations to the following NHTSA employees who were recognized for Length of Service, July 29, 2003

## Office of Administrator

Otis G. Cox, Jr. 25 years

## Administration

Johnetta Whitfield 20 years

## Office of the Chief Information Officer

Robert A. Hornickle 35 years

## Advanced Research and Analysis

John A. Hinch 20 years

Howell K. Brewer 35 years

August L. Burgett 30 years

Maria M. Maxwell 35 years

Brenda Jones 35 years

## Applied Research

Rita I. Gibbons 30 years

## Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Budget

Steven J. Peirce 30 years

Thuy C. Lynch 20 years

## Rulemaking

Claude H. Harris 30 years

Stanley H. Backaitis 35 years

Joseph P. Scott 20 years

## Enforcement

Ethel C. Hayden 30 years

Steve N. Chan 20 years

Theodore W. Bayler 35 years

## Office of Injury Control Operations and Resources

Barbara J. Pierce 25 years

Curtis A. Winston 20 years

James C. Ryan 25 years

Nanette Hall 25 years

Michael G. Witter 25 years



*James Ryan, Senior Regional Program Manager NHTSA Region I, emphasizes the importance of the life saving Sober Ride program and extols the participation of the coalition members.*

## Sober Riding in Region I

The Boston/Cambridge SoberRide program kick off was held on July 3<sup>rd</sup> at Boston Police Headquarters. SoberRide is a program that offers complimentary cab rides to would-be drunk drivers on holidays associated with high levels of drinking. The program, which aims to reduce the high number of alcohol-related traffic incidents and improve the public safety of local communities nationwide, was introduced in five markets in 2002.

The program provided services from 11 pm on July 3<sup>rd</sup> through 1 am on July 5<sup>th</sup>. ■

*NHTSA Now* is an official publication of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Communications and Consumer Information.

Kathryn Henry, Editor

Contributors: Rae Tyson, OCCI; Tim Hurd, OCCI; Juan Cardona, National Sheriffs' Association; Bill Naff, Region III; Prentis Kie, NAD; Stephanie Hancock, Region III; Joey Syner, Office of Safety Programs.

If you would like to submit articles or photographs, please email them to [khenry@nhtsa.dot.gov](mailto:khenry@nhtsa.dot.gov); or mail them to 400 7th Street, SW, Suite 5232, Washington, DC 20590.