

## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers July 15, 2004

### NETS Features

#### **State Achieves Record Safety Belt Use**

The Office of Highway Safety Planning is pleased to announce the statewide safety belt use rate in Michigan increased to an all time high of 87 percent over the Memorial Day holiday. We thank each of our NETS members for all they accomplished to promote the Click It or Ticket, Buckle Up or Pay Up campaigns in the workplace. We are very encouraged by this news and are confident that with your continued support and assistance, that the state will achieve 90% safety belt use when the last statewide survey this year is taken over the Labor Day holiday. For more information visit

[http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1586\\_1710-97066--M\\_2004\\_7,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1586_1710-97066--M_2004_7,00.html)

For additional information on what you can do to promote belt use in the workplace please link to [http://michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1593\\_3504-90082--00.html](http://michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1593_3504-90082--00.html) or contact Dan Vartanian at the Office of Highway Safety Planning: e-mail: [vartanid@michigan.gov](mailto:vartanid@michigan.gov) or call (517) 333-5322.

#### **Traffic Safety: An Emerging Issue for Army**

The U.S. Army is looking to improve and modernize their military vehicles since the lack of safety features is quickly becoming a contributing factor to the unnecessary deaths of U.S. soldiers. Last year, the Army experienced its worst military vehicle crash rate in a decade with 833 crashes, 50 deaths, and 233 injuries. Other contributing factors to this increased rate were the use of vehicles prone to roll overs, such as the Humvee, overcrowding and overloading these vehicles, and the lack of seat belt use due to both lack of enforcement and the inability to secure the seat belt over field equipment. This new focus on safety comes as the Army and General Motors are teaming up to reduce the number of crashes involving soldiers in their personal vehicles. **Michigan NETS Advisory Council member, Jay Minotas, Manager of G.M's Safe Driving Program is working with Army officials on this project.** According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 202 service members died in private vehicle crashes in fiscal year 2003; 69 of those deaths involved Army personnel. For more information visit <http://www.detnews.com/specialreports/2004/military/>

#### **Steer Clear of Bad Driving**

Everyday millions of drivers take to our nation's roadways. While we hope that they devote all of their attention to driving when behind the wheel, the truth is today's drivers are distracted by a variety of activities both inside and outside their vehicle increasing their chances of making a bad decision on the roadway. One of your best defenses against these distracted drivers and their inevitable mistakes are to expect their bad decisions and steer clear of them. For more information visit

[http://www.netsnational.org/newsletter/7\\_15\\_04a.asp](http://www.netsnational.org/newsletter/7_15_04a.asp)

### Latest Traffic Safety News

#### **Dashboard Icons Confusing for Many Drivers**

More and more automakers are replacing dashboard words, which describe in-car functions and possible malfunctions, with icons and symbols. The transition allows automakers to make fewer changes when selling the same car in different countries, therefore saving money. In many vehicles today, the words "headlight," "horn," and "air conditioning" are being replaced with images of a light



bulb, a bugle, and a snowflake. However, many drivers are finding the icons indecipherable and confusing. The International Organization for Standardization has approved 162 icons, while NHTSA approved only 32 icons. For more information visit [http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2004-07-05-auto-icons\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2004-07-05-auto-icons_x.htm)

## **Drivers Favor Improved Vehicle Safety Standards**

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety has released its latest Lou Harris Poll on highway and auto safety attitudes in the United States.

According to the poll, 84 percent of the American public, including 8 of 10 sports utility vehicle (SUV) owners, favor the U.S. government mandating manufacturers to make all motor vehicles, including SUVs, more stable and less likely to roll over in crashes. For additional poll results, visit [http://www.saferoads.org/press/press2004/pr\\_HarrisPoll7-12-04.htm](http://www.saferoads.org/press/press2004/pr_HarrisPoll7-12-04.htm)

## **Urban Mobility Corporation Brief Questions Efficiency of Carpool Lanes**

As roadways are becoming more congested in major metropolitan areas, many traffic experts are questioning the rationale behind limiting valuable roadway space for the shrinking carpool population. Proposed legislation in California would allow low-emission vehicles access to these lanes, as well. However, many argue that this is not an incentive to buy these vehicles, as they are selling well without access to carpool lanes. Critics of carpool lanes suggest that express toll lanes could be the answer, as they would generate millions of dollars that could be used to improve the nation's highways. Read additional commentary at

<http://www.innobriefs.com/abstracts/2004/jul04.html#3>

## **Cell Phones Allow Employers to Track Employees**

A California start-up company has adapted the cell phone to allow employers to track and monitor their employees' whereabouts. Known as AtlasTrack, the technology works with Global Positioning System satellites and Nextel's wireless Network. Radio chips in the phone send messages to the home office as often as once a minute, allowing employers to identify the location of the phone, ascertain whether it's stationary or moving, and use maps to show the current location of all employees. The creators are also working to release a phone that can double as a personal navigator allowing drivers to enter their destination into the phone and receive an on-screen map and directions, which can also be read via the phone's speaker. Read the full article at <http://www.jsonline.com/bym/news/jul04/241005.asp>

## **Iowa Rest Areas Among First With Free Internet Access**

Iowa's interstate highway rest areas are now equipped with wireless access where motorists can check their e-mail and surf the Internet for free. Iowa is one of the first states to provide this service for motorists. Texas began experimenting with the idea last fall. Users will be directed to a customized home page that includes links to Iowa weather and road conditions, Amber Alert messages, and information concerning food, lodging, fuel, and tourist attractions. Read the full article at <http://desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040630/NEWS08/406300350/1001/NEWS&lead=1>. Read the press release at

<http://www.dot.state.ia.us/06290401.html>

## **NJ Company Helps Truckers Take the Easy Road**

Using global positioning satellites and vast databases that know every speed limit, every traffic light and every road restriction, ALK Technologies has developed software telling truckers not only how to get where they're going, but instantly plots the quickest truck-friendly route between any two points. It also enables truckers to avoid tolls and, to some degree, traffic. While the technology generally costs



between \$2,000 and \$3,000, a rather high expenditure for trucking companies, the benefits are worthwhile for its users. Truckers generally get paid by the distance they drive not the time they spend on the road. The faster they reach their destinations, the faster they earn their money, and the more trips they can make. For more information visit

<http://www.newsday.com/news/local/wire/ny-bc-nj--businessexchange0704jul04,0,7157503.story?coll=ny-ap-regional-wire>

## **Solar Powered System To Warn Motorists of Animals on Road**

The system will alert drivers traveling on a highway near Yellowstone National Park of nearby animals on the road. The system will focus on a one-mile section of the highway, where collisions between passing vehicles and elk are common. It uses high-frequency radio beams to detect the presence of large animals, including elk, bison, and moose, and then sets of solar-powered blinking lights to alert drivers. The system, which cost \$349,000, is expected to become operational soon. Read the full article at <http://www.missoulian.com/articles/2004/07/02/mtracker/news/25solar.txt>

## **Attention Women: Are You A Severe Driver?**

Severe drivers make five trips a day, drive 17,000 miles a year, and drive at least two-thirds of the time in stop-and-go traffic. These driving behaviors require increased vehicle maintenance and repair. And according to a study by the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association, many women drivers don't classify themselves as severe drivers and may be putting themselves at risk. The study reports that only 4 percent of female drivers consider themselves severe drivers, while 41 percent actually are severe drivers. For more information visit <http://www.autonews.com/news.cms?newsId=9193>. Read the press release at [http://www.apaa.org/Information/Press\\_Releases/061704\\_b.asp](http://www.apaa.org/Information/Press_Releases/061704_b.asp)

## **Washington, DC, New Jersey Ban the Use of Handheld Cell Phones**

As of July 1, drivers in Washington, DC and New Jersey will no longer be able to use a handheld cell phone while driving a motor vehicle. The District of Columbia made using a handheld cell phone a primary offense, meaning that a police officer can stop a driver for just using one. Under the New Jersey ban, police officers cannot stop a vehicle unless he observes another offense. New York was the first state to ban the use of handheld cell phones while driving. Read the full article at [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/05/automobiles/05dt\\_autolog.html?8dt](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/05/automobiles/05dt_autolog.html?8dt)

## **New Guide Helps Families Talk to Older Drivers**

The MIT/Hartford guide, We Need to Talk: Family Conversations with Older Drivers, is designed to help families worried about an aging parent's ability to drive safely. According to the developers, research shows that most drivers over age 65 self-regulate, or voluntarily restrict, their driving to avoid night driving, slippery road conditions, rush hour traffic, or other difficult driving conditions. The guide includes a checklist of warning signs, alternative transportation strategies, testing opportunities, and recommendations on what to do if a high-risk elderly driver refuses to stop driving. For more information visit <http://www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers/>

## **TRB Releases Guide To Increase Seatbelt Use**

The Transportation Research Board's National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 500 -- Guidance for Implementation of the AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan; Volume 11: A Guide for Increasing Seatbelt Use provides strategies that can be employed to increase the use of seatbelts. View the guide at [http://trb.org/publications/nchrp/nchrp\\_rpt\\_500v11.pdf](http://trb.org/publications/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_500v11.pdf)

## **NADA, NHTSA Recognize October as Booster Seat Safety Month**

In partnership with NHTSA, the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) has named October "Booster Seat Safety Month." As part of the public awareness campaign, new car dealers in all 50



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states will host child safety events at their dealerships. The announcement comes as research indicates that parents are not aware that older children, between the ages of 4 and 8 weighing 40 to 80 pounds, should be secured in booster seats. Recent surveys also show that only 15 percent of booster-aged children are properly belted. For more information visit [http://www.nada.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Newsroom/News\\_Releases/2004/misc\\_06\\_22\\_04.htm](http://www.nada.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Newsroom/News_Releases/2004/misc_06_22_04.htm)

### **Florida DOT Questions the Effects of 40 MPH Minimum Signs**

A new report for the Florida Department of Transportation found that the state's 40 mph minimum speed limit signs has little effect on highway safety. Florida was one of the first states to implement the national maximum speed limit of 75 mph. However, 40 mph minimum signs were also added to many of these state highways. Based on an analysis of speed data and crash statistics from before and after the increase, Florida researchers found that increasing the median speed significantly reduced the number of crashes, however increasing the variation between fast and slow traffic increased the number of crashes.

### **News from USDOT**

#### **New NHTSA Rules Could Mandate Side-Impact Air Bags**

NHTSA has proposed new test procedures and regulations to set standards for head protection in side impact crashes. Although NHTSA doesn't stipulate the use of side-impact air bags to do so, there is discussion that these new rules would mandate the use of side-impact airbags. Automakers have volunteered the commitment to make head protection air bags standard by 2010 with an estimate of \$208 per vehicle or \$1.6 to \$3.6 billion annually. The changes are estimated to save 700 to 1,000 lives a year. View the new rules at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/sideimpact/>

#### **NHTSA Proposes Rule on Safer Power Windows**

Seven children have died in the past three months nationwide due to strangulation by automatic power windows. Next month, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will propose a rule requiring safer power windows. The rule will be followed by a comment period and phase-in period for industry compliance. Until recently, power windows were thought to cause two to four child deaths a year.

#### **Airbags Credited with Saving 15,000 Lives Over Last 20 Years**

According to a report by the Associated Press, the U.S. government estimates that 15,000 people have been saved by airbags since a 1984 order was signed requiring all vehicles to have driver's side air bags. Soon after, passenger-side air bags were mandated and later improved upon to better accommodate smaller passengers, including women and children. The use of air bags continues to grow as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is expected to slowly phase in side air bags and make them a requirement by the year 2009.

#### **FMCSA Issues Report on Commercial Driver Retention Rates and Safety**

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Office of Research and Technology issued a tech brief finding a significant relationship between job change rate and crash involvement for commercial motor vehicle drivers. View the full report at [http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safetyprogs/research/briefs/driver\\_retention\\_safety.pdf](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safetyprogs/research/briefs/driver_retention_safety.pdf)

#### **Can Antihistamines Impair Driving?**

NHTSA has released a report that examines the potential effects of antihistamines on driving impairment. The report comes as the widespread use of antihistamines is increasingly becoming



recognized for causing sedation and central nervous system dysfunction, which can impair driving. View the full report at

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/research/antihistamines/Antihistamines%20Web/index.htm>

## **International Traffic Safety News:**

### **Lack of Traffic Safety Knowledge Hinders Improvement**

The lack of work-related road safety knowledge among UK company directors could be hindering the improvement of safety for employees on the road, according to a recent study. This recent research indicates that an overwhelming majority of businesses do not have a risk management strategy in place. The report, entitled "Profit Through Safety," sponsored by Kwik-Fit, found that 25 percent of respondents don't report crashes involving company vehicles and 21 percent of respondents never discussed issues associated with business vehicles.

### **UK Fleets Warned, Insurance Bills Too High**

According to research by Goodwood Fleet Management, companies failing to implement crash management policies good be wasting thousands of pounds on excessive insurance premiums. Researchers say that companies continue to pay higher premiums because they are not confident that they have all the necessary facts to justify a change. Researchers also say that by recording the number of traffic incidents, how long vehicles and drivers are on and off the road, and the costs to the business can help a company produce a crash management report. According to the report, only 15 percent of companies have a comprehensive road risk policy. View the full report at

[http://newsweaver.co.uk/gfm/e\\_article000270626.cfm](http://newsweaver.co.uk/gfm/e_article000270626.cfm)

### **Traffic Simulation System Predicts Roadway Congestion**

German engineers have developed a traffic simulation system that can predict traffic jams before they occur by analyzing the way drivers and their vehicles behave on the road. The computer model uses a system of grids and cells, which are marked as either containing a vehicle or empty. The number of empty cells between the virtual vehicles depends on the way people are driving. The model found that abrupt lane changes, unsafe following distance, or other aggressive driving behaviors that force other drivers to brake hard can and significantly impact traffic flow. Read the full article at

<http://www.innovations-report.com/html/reports/logistics/report-30794.html>

### **UK Government Releases 2003 Crash Statistics**

The UK Department for Transport released its national statistics for 2003 on road casualties in Great Britain. The report found that while the number of traffic-related deaths rose 2 percent, the total number of people injured in roadway crashes decreased by 4 percent. View the full report at

[http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_transstats/documents/downloadable/dft\\_transstats\\_029324.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/downloadable/dft_transstats_029324.pdf)

### **Survey: 'Road Calming' Strategies Backfire**

According to a recent survey conducted by Autoglass new traffic calming measures are not working on the majority of UK company car drivers, and instead are causing them to drive more aggressively. As many as seven out of 10 drivers admitted to speeding to make up for time lost due to speed cameras and speed bumps. More than half admitted to driving too closely to the vehicle in front of them and driving aggressively after traveling through one of these areas. The survey also found that one third of drivers claim that they have had a crash due to the new measures. View the results of the survey at

[http://www.autoglass.co.uk/press/news/drivers\\_rebel\\_against\\_road\\_safety\\_measures.asp](http://www.autoglass.co.uk/press/news/drivers_rebel_against_road_safety_measures.asp)

### **Speeding Debate Fuels Hostility Among UK Drivers**

Arguments over speeding and the use of speed cameras reached new levels this year in the UK when death threats were issued against campaigners who supported anti-speed mechanisms. Opponents argue that bad driving and not speeding causes crashes. However, research indicates that speeding reduces drive time only by minutes and puts the driver at risk for a crash. Meanwhile, the feud continues to heat up as opponents of speed enforcement cameras suggest that road safety executives be 'knocked off' or 'have their brake cables cut.'

### **UK Tests Cars That Won't Let Driver Speed**

The Intelligent Speed Adaptation (ISA) system automatically applies the brakes if a motorist goes to fast and will not allow them to accelerate. It is hoped that ISA will save lives and prevent many drivers from losing their licenses. The system costs around £200 and uses onboard computers and satellite positioning to identify the speed of a road. For six months, twenty British motorists will participate in the government-approved trial. An ISA trial in Sweden with 10,000 drivers ended with 75 percent of the participants wanting to keep the technology in their cars. Read the full article at <http://www.thesun.co.uk/article/0,,2-2004302085,,00.html>

### **UK Fleet Managers Debate Speed Cameras**

In the UK, recent government figures show that 57 percent of motorists exceeded roadway speed limits, with the number traveling faster than 80 mph rising slightly from about 18 percent between 1998 and 2002 to 20 percent in 2003. In response, the UK government has started using fixed and mobile speed cameras, tripling the number of fines issued from about 300,000 to well over one million. However, fleet decision makers state that despite the massive increase in speed cameras, road deaths increased year. There are also concerns among fleet decision makers that speed cameras will eventually end up banning key personnel from the driving seat.

### **New Report Examines Road Roughness and Driver Comfort**

The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute released a report examining the relationship between the roughness of the road surface and perceived comfort of drivers. The report also discusses drivers' willingness to pay for improved driving comfort. The report is available in Swedish with a summary in English at <http://www.vti.se/pdf/reports/M957.pdf>

### **UK Installs Roadside Signs Alerting Drivers of Delay Times**

New high-tech electronic message boards are being installed along UK roadways alerting drivers of roadway delay times due to road work. The 13 signs will display the approximate travel time from the sign location throughout the work zone. The signs get their information from data obtained by cameras placed along the roadways. The data is transmitted and processed every four minutes by the System for Urban Management and Information Transmission (SUMIT), which evaluates and calculates the information and if necessary, automatically updates the signs. For more information visit <http://www.thesentinel.co.uk/displayNode.jsp?nodeId=67725&command=displayContent&sourceNode=67252&contentPK=10542633>

### **Swedish Report Examines Snow Tire Performance**

The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute has released a report examining studded and unstudded snow tires, focusing on age, tread depth, tread rubber hardness, stud protrusion, and stud force. The report is available in Swedish with a summary in English at <http://www.vti.se/pdf/reports/M965.pdf>