

## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers May 20, 2004

### NETS FEATURES

#### **Fleet Safety Policies: Protecting Lives and Your Bottom Line**

Whether managing a fleet of 25 passenger cars or 500 heavy-duty trucks, over the past year many organizations have made significant changes to their fleet policies. In fact, organizations find themselves constantly making adjustments to meet their unique needs and challenges. To help develop these policies, it is important for organizations to look at current industry trends, research, and data. Through this course of action, organizations can learn what policies are working, how they can tailor them to meet the dynamic needs of their individual fleet management process, and ultimately reduce the risks associated with fleet operation.

...More: [http://www.netsnational.org/newsletter/5\\_15\\_04a.asp](http://www.netsnational.org/newsletter/5_15_04a.asp)

### Latest Traffic Safety News

#### **Insurance Rate Increases Force Companies Toward Training**

Skyrocketing insurance rates and runaway jury awards are forcing trucking companies to invest more in safety programs. The article encourages companies to go beyond the basic skills taught to new recruits, and stresses that conducting safety meeting several times a year where the safety director stands up and does the "talking head" routine isn't enough. Employers need an effective, ongoing, well-documented training program that helps drivers hone their driving skills and provides remedial instruction in areas where drivers are struggling. To view the full article in Heavy Duty Trucking, visit <http://www.heavydutytrucking.com/2004/03/058a0403.asp>

#### **NIOSH Releases Worker Health Chartbook**

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has released a pre-publication version of its 2004 Worker Health Chartbook. This chart-based document consolidates information obtained from U.S. injury and illness surveillance systems and is designed as a resource for agencies, organizations, employers, researchers, workers, and others who need to know about occupational injuries and illnesses. To view the chartbook, visit

[http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/chartbook/pdfs/Chartbook\\_2004\\_Prepub.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/chartbook/pdfs/Chartbook_2004_Prepub.pdf)

#### **TTI Focuses Research on New Headlights and Traffic Signs**

The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) has conducted a report on the effects of new headlights and new signage on the night driving environment. According to the report, improving nighttime visibility and replacing signs that do not reflect light well is an important element of improving the overall visibility of the nighttime driving environment. But another problem resides with the emergence of new headlights. Many of the most modern headlamps have a sharp "cutoff"—a very noticeable difference in the area where the light shines and where it does not shine. The cutoff headlamps project less light at signs, making them appear dimmer to the driver than they would appear with older style headlamps. Trends for drivers and headlamps are making signs less visible, leaving it up to sign improvements to make up the difference. For more information, visit the TTI website at <http://tti.tamu.edu/researcher/newsletter.asp?vol=40&issue=1&article=4>

### **New Legislation for Aggressive Driving Being Proposed**

Steve Geller, a Florida state senator, is proposing a law that would allow police to write \$80 tickets to discourteous “me-first” drivers who cut in front of others. And he is not the only lawmaker proposing these types of laws. Legislators in at least 12 other states are part of a growing effort to enforce civility on inconsiderate motorists. This law would encompass drivers who: tailgate, abruptly change lanes, excessively speed and pass on the shoulder. To view the full article, visit [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-05-04-cutoff-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-05-04-cutoff-usat_x.htm)

### **Litigation Continues in Distracted Driving Fatality**

A lawsuit has been filed by the estate of a 6-year-old girl killed Jan. 13th against a company and its commercial truck driver, who allegedly rear-ended her stopped school bus while reaching for his cell phone. This litigation has serious implications for businesses with employees who use cell phones and other communications devices while driving on company business. For the full article, visit <http://rcrnews.com/cgi-bin/news.pl?newsId=17988&type=news&bt=settlement%20talks%20under%20way>

### **Larger Tires and Lift Kits Could Make Vehicles More Susceptible to Rollover**

A new American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) study warns that after-market oversize tires and lift kits can affect rollover propensity and braking performance, resulting in deaths and injuries. In addition, light trucks raised several inches above stock heights can create mismatched bumper heights with traditional passenger cars. And when these trucks and cars crash, fatalities are higher for the car occupants. For more information, visit the AAMVA website at [http://www.aamva.org/Documents/nwsPressReleaseAlteredHeight\\_04182004.pdf](http://www.aamva.org/Documents/nwsPressReleaseAlteredHeight_04182004.pdf)

### **Impaired Driving Lawsuit Involving City Officials Settled**

Detroit officials have authorized settling two lawsuits filed by families of Detroit residents who were struck in 2002– one fatally- by city officials who had been drinking and driving in city vehicles. Both crashes involved employees from the city’s water department. The settlements awarded to the families totaled \$9.4 million.

### **U.S. Drivers are More Likely to Wash Cars Than Check Tire Pressure**

U.S. drivers are more likely to wash their cars than correctly check their tire pressure, according to a national survey released on April 30th by the Rubber Manufacturers Association (RMA). The survey found that three out four American drivers wash their vehicle at least once a month, while only one in seven correctly checks tire pressure. Motorists rank checking tire pressure as the second most important regular vehicle safety action, but more than three times as many drivers believe regular oil changes are most important to the safe operation of their vehicles. Correct tire pressure maximizes vehicle safety, performance and tire life, but according to the survey 85 percent of drivers do not properly check tire pressure. For more information, view the RMA press release at <http://www.rma.org/newsroom/release.cfm?ID=119>

### **New Robotic Traffic Cones**

According to an article in New Scientist magazine on April 28th, herds of robotic traffic cones could soon be swarming onto highways, closing down lanes and slowing the traffic. The new self-propelled road markers take the form of robotic three-wheeled bases for the brightly colored barrels that are set out to mark road repair zones. These markers can open and close traffic lanes faster and more safely than humans. The markers are delivered to the roadside by a specially equipped truck, from which an operator controls their deployment using a laptop computer. Each fleet of robots is made up of a lead



robot or "shepherd", which is equipped with a global positioning system satellite navigation receiver, plus a number of less expensive "dumb" units. For more information, view the article in New Scientist at <http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99994932> or the MSNBC article at <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/4872379/>

## **New Device to Help Control Traffic**

Using patented Digital Wave Radar to check traffic levels and flow, Wavetronix LLC is helping traffic planners and traffic control centers get people from Point A to Point B efficiently. The company's traffic monitoring devices, known as SmartSensors, are laptop-computer-size sensors and are usually placed about halfway up camera poles along highways. The sensors take a cross-section look at traffic and are able to gauge counts, average speeds, congestion and the mix of large and small vehicles in each lane. The data is used by traffic operators who may implement ramp metering or other traffic flow devices or those who update information on 511 travel calling services, overhead message boards, or the Internet. For more information, visit <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/1,1249,595060008,00.html>

## **GM: Drivers May Not Have To Check Oil Every 3000 Miles**

General Motors challenges the long-standing rule of changing vehicles' oil every three months or every 3000 miles. GM says that this is too often for the average driver and a waste of time and money. This declaration was part of a promotional program for its new on-board computer systems that will alert the driver of the engine's condition.

## **Ever Been Car Sick? Maybe This Could Help**

Sufferers of car sickness could get help from a device that plugs into a car's cigarette lighter and alerts drivers that passengers will be ill unless the motorist's driving improves. "Drivers rarely fell sick, so they often blame it on the passengers – who are often children – because they are more susceptible," says inventor Jelte Bos of TNO, a Dutch organization for applied scientific research. The prototype carsickness indicator contains three accelerometers to sense motion along three axes and a microchip to calculate how nauseating the car's motions are.

## **News from USDOT**

### **Major Regulatory Upgrade in Side Impact Crash Protection**

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta recently proposed a major regulatory upgrade in side-impact crash protection for all passenger vehicles. The proposed upgrade, developed by NHTSA, would require auto manufacturers to provide head protection in side crashes for the first time. It would also enhance thorax and pelvis protection for a wider range of vehicle occupants involved in such crashes. In addition, the upgrade—which would strengthen Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 214—represents a significant advance in the use of crash test dummies. For the first time, a dummy representing a small adult female would be used in side-impact performance testing. A new and more technically advanced dummy representing an adult male of average height would also be used in such crash testing. To view the NHTSA press release, visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2004&filename=pr22-04.html> For a series of graphics related to the proposed upgrade visit [http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/sideimpact/NHTSA\\_Handouts.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/sideimpact/NHTSA_Handouts.pdf)

### **NHTSA Announces Annual Fatality Report Results**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) annual preliminary report on highway fatalities is traditionally a "good news/bad news" document, showing improvements in some areas and setbacks in others. However, the overall picture usually has been an improving one. Unfortunately,



2003 marks the fourth consecutive year of rising highway fatalities—from 42,815 in 2002 to 43,220 in 2003—it also marked the highest number of fatalities since 1990. However, despite this increase, NHTSA estimates that the fatality rate in 2003 remained unchanged from 2002—1.5 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. And although passenger car fatalities declined by 778, sport-utility vehicle fatalities increased by 456, 55 percent of which was rollover crashes. Motorcycles fatalities also increased by 11 percent or 348 to 3,592. Once again, alcohol use and seat belt non-use played huge parts in 2003's fatality count with 58 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles not wearing seat belts, the agency reported. And 40 percent, or 17,401, of all fatalities were alcohol related. To view the preliminary results, visit <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/PPT/2003EARelease.pdf>

## **FHWA Mandates Larger Street Signs**

The Federal Highway Safety Administration (FHWA) has a new nationwide mandate to make street signs larger for the aging population. Street signs will be replaced in coming years with signs that bear 6-inch letters. Experts say the larger wording will make driving safer for aging drivers and others. By 2020, there will be about 40 million drivers over age 65, forcing the highway administration to establish new rules. To view the full article, visit <http://www.dfw.com/mlid/dfw/news/8574525.htm>

## **NHTSA Releases Brochure on Driving After a Stroke**

NHTSA has released "Driving When You Have Had a Stroke," a brochure designed to assist families and health care professionals talk with stroke victims about their ability to drive safely. To view brochure, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/Stroke/images/Stroke.pdf>

## **Report on Non-Traffic Related Vehicle Hazards**

NHTSA has released a report that examines the extent of selected non-traffic motor vehicle-related hazards, and assesses the relative value of various sources of information on those hazards. To view this report, visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/PressDisplay.cfm?year=%202004&filename=pr20-04.html>

## **Are You a "Stretch Commuter"?**

About 3.3 million Americans have a "stretch commute" or travel 50 miles or more one way to get to work. And according to the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) conducted by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), they commute these distances 329 million times a year. The survey found "stretch commutes" to be disproportionately rural—two out of every five "stretch commutes" start in rural areas. A one-way "stretch commute" can range between 50 and 99 miles in length and are nearly an everyday occurrence with commutes made at least four days a week. While one out of five (19 percent) "stretch commutes" is at least 100 miles, more than one in 20 (six percent) can be called "super-stretch commutes," trips to work of 200 miles or more, one-way. To view the findings and press release, visit the BTS website at [http://www.bts.dot.gov/press\\_releases/2004/bts010\\_04/html/bts010\\_04.html](http://www.bts.dot.gov/press_releases/2004/bts010_04/html/bts010_04.html)

## **SUV Crash Test Report Released**

NHTSA has posted the crash test results for model year 2002 sport utility vehicles. The test results and press release can be found on NHTSA's website at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2004&filename=pr21-04.html>

## International Traffic Safety News:

### **Maintaining Line Markings Could Save Lives**

The Australian Institute of Traffic Planning and Management (AITPM) says line markings, which are described as “an essential element of the modern road system”, are the most cost effective road safety measure. Simple maintenance of line markings with regard to correct levels of contrast and brightness can reduce car crashes by as much as 60 percent, according to the report, especially on bends at night and on rural roads. To view the article from the Sydney Morning Herald, visit <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/11/1084041411408.html>

### **U.K. Risk Assessment Found More Drivers to be at Medium or High Risk**

A national U.K. risk assessment of more than 10,000 company car drivers has shown a quarter of them to be medium or high risk. The online fleet risk assessment completed by Data Programmes, part of the Fleetsafe group, used a series of multiple-choice questions to assess individual risk on the road. A fifth of drivers were classed as medium risk with 5 percent in the high risk bracket. Almost half of the drivers polled were classed as low to medium risk, with 30 percent being rated medium risk. Training will be offered to all drivers, including those determined to be low risk.

### **U.K. Companies Not Enforcing Driving-Mobile Phone Usage Policies**

Much concern has been raised in recent months in relation to drivers who are ignoring the U.K. Government ban of hand-held mobile phones while driving. Although a minority, employers must be aware of these drivers, should their disobedience of the law cause a crash while driving on business. While fleet decision-makers can only do so much to ensure drivers comply with the law, they must be able to prove they have done everything they can to meet their duty of care to employees and other road users. Yet according to recent research by Green Flag Motoring Assistance, one-third of drivers say their employers have made no attempt to advise them about the use of mobile phones when driving for work, despite last December's ban. The research indicated that only one in four have been clearly updated on new company policy as a result of the ban.

### **Proper Posture While Driving Can Reduce Back Pain-Related Absences**

If you are sitting comfortably, you are a lot less likely to suffer back pain at the end of a day behind the wheel of your company car. Thought to be the reason behind more than 11 million working days lost each year, the all-too-familiar motoring ailment costs British industries a staggering £5 billion. Yet most of the pain and cost could be saved, according to latest research findings. After a study showed that more than 78 percent of drivers do not sit in the optimal position for comfort and safety, the RAC Foundation asked for advice from posture expert Dr Alison Harvey, of the Ayr Chiropractic Centre. According to Dr. Harvey:

Stressed motorists tend to concentrate tension in their necks, shoulders and stomachs leading to physical pain and discomfort or high blood pressure and heart disease.

Regular breaks while driving are crucial to preventing leg and especially back pain. The discs in our back do not have their own blood supply and rely on regular movements for their supply of nutrients. Ideally, no one should driver more than an hour without getting a break. Breaks can also improve concentration. Improperly reclined seats can increase muscle tension and increase the risk of whiplash injuries in hard braking or emergency stops. Sitting to erect can put a severe strain on the lower back muscles and joints. In the a crash, this posture can increase the severity of whiplash and lower back injuries.