

## Traffic Safety News & Facts For Employers

February 3, 2003

- 1. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has sent the Office of Management and Budget its plan to revise the hours-of-service rules for truck and bus drivers. The content of the plan has not been made public. The Clinton Administration put forth a controversial proposal to rewrite the rules in April 2000. At that time Congress ordered the FMCSA to shelve the proposal and conduct further study on the issue. Reportedly, the new plan has been sent to OMB for approval as a final rule, so public hearings will not be held before a final rule is issued.
- 2. The State of Michigan's annual evaluation of police patrol vehicles is now available online. The tests are designed to meet Michigan's specific needs, but results are frequently consulted by other agencies. The 2003 evaluations include four police vehicles (AM General Hummer HMCS, Chevrolet Impala, Dodge Intrepid, and the Ford Police Interceptor) and five special service vehicles (Chevrolet Tahoe 2-wheel drive, Chevrolet Tahoe 4-wheel drive, Ford Expedition 2-wheel drive, Ford Expedition 4-wheel drive, and the Ford Explorer 2-wheel drive). Each vehicle is rated for dynamics, acceleration, top speed, braking, ergonomics and communications, and fuel economy. Since 1981, the National Institute of Justice has sponsored the tests through the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC), in a partnership with the Michigan State Police. To download a copy of the full report visit [www.justnet.org](http://www.justnet.org) or request a printed copy from NLECTC at (301) 519-5060.
- 3. Dr. Jeffrey W. Runge, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) advised auto industry professionals to use caution when introducing new, high-tech devices that offer services such as e-mail, news alerts, weather and stock quotes in vehicles. Runge said in a speech that the industry has a fundamental responsibility to assess the hazard potential of the devices before introducing them. The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers has developed voluntary principles



for limiting the effect of new devices on driving, but some groups want the NHTSA to regulate the technology. NHTSA officials have said they have no current plans to regulate the in-vehicle technology. "We cannot regulate fast enough to keep up with technological innovation, nor would we want to," Runge said.

- ¶ The New Jersey Assembly's Transportation Committee held a hearing Monday on whether to restrict the use of cell phones by drivers. Under consideration are restricting drivers' use of hand-held cell phones; increasing penalties for those involved in accidents while using hand-held cell phones; and a total ban on all cell phone use while driving. Representatives from the American Automobile Association of New Jersey chapters and from wireless companies explained their support for stepped-up education programs to curb distracted driving. The committee is expected to hold hearings on final proposals in February.
- ¶ Rep. Bobby Parham (D-Milledgeville) introduced a bill in the Georgia state legislature that would restrict the use of hand-held cell phones by drivers. Drivers' use of hand-held cell phones for other than emergency calls would be a misdemeanor carrying a fine of \$15 or less. "Education not legislation is the real answer to all distracted driving issues," said a spokesperson for the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association.
- ¶ The Glenwood Springs, Colorado City Council put restricting drivers' use of cell phones low on its priority list. The council said an ordinance on cell phones and driving could be difficult to draft and difficult to enforce, and would not "eliminate stupidity." Any activity that draws drivers' attention away from the road, whether it's eating a hamburger or talking on a cell phone, if it's unsafe, the police should pull them over," a councilman said.
- Toyota is equipping some new cars for the Japanese market that use radar and wireless networking to sense and prepare for crashes before they happen. The safety technology allows the car to detect an oncoming object, tighten seat belts and add breaking force within a second before a crash. The safety feature will be available on a Lexus



model to be introduced next month in Japan. Toyota said it has no current plan to introduce the feature in overseas markets.

- Automobiles rank close second to toothbrushes! Teens and adults agree that the toothbrush is the one invention they cannot live without. The 2003 Lemelson-MIT Invention Index, an annual survey of Americans' perceptions about inventing and innovating, uncovered that technologically advanced items such as personal computers, cell phones and microwave ovens significantly lag in importance behind the toothbrush, which was developed in the 15th century. When asked to select the invention they could not live without from among five choices - - toothbrush, automobile, personal computer, cell phone and microwave -- more than a third of teens (34 percent) and almost half of adults (42 percent) cited the toothbrush. The automobile ranked a close second, getting votes from 31 percent of teens and 37 percent of adults. Of the remaining choices, teens ranked the personal computer third (16 percent), the cell phone fourth (10 percent) and the microwave last (7 percent). Adults deemed the remaining choices equally important; the personal computer (6 percent), microwave oven (6 percent) and the cell phone (6 percent) tied for third place.
- New Jersey Democratic Senator Jon Corzine recently introduced the Mobile Telephone Driving Safety Act of 2003. The proposed legislation, S. 179, according to Corzine, "would enhance highway safety by encouraging states to restrict the use of cell phones by drivers while they are operating a motor vehicle." The legislation is structured in a manner similar to other federal laws designed to promote highway safety, such as laws that encourage states to enact tough drunk driving standards. Under the legislation, a portion of Federal highway funds would be withheld from states that do not enact a ban on cell phone use while driving. Initially, this funding could be restored if states act to move into compliance. Later, the highway funding forfeited by one state would be distributed to other states that are in compliance. Experience has shown that the threat of losing highway funding is very effective in ensuring that states comply. For the full legislative description visit <http://www.theorator.com/bills108/s179.html>.



- The U.S. Department of Transportation encourages fleet managers - and fleet drivers - to report suspected safety defects in vehicles, vehicle equipment and child safety seats. Fleets can download forms to report safety defects, posters to promote the hotline contact information, and more. Visit the NHTSA website at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline/hotlineorder.html](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline/hotlineorder.html).
- ☞ According to a study by researchers David Strayer, Frank Drews and William Johnston at the University of Utah, conversing on cell phones while driving disrupts the driver's attention to the visual environment, leading to what the authors call "inattention blindness," or the inability to recognize objects encountered in the driver's visual field. The study used 20 participants in controlled, simulated driving conditions. The researchers found that when participants were directing their gaze at objects in the driving environment, they may fail to "see" them when they were using a cell phone because attention was directed elsewhere. The data also suggests that legislative initiatives that restrict hand-held devices but permit hands-free devices are not likely to eliminate the problems associated with using cell phones while driving, the authors said. The study is featured in the February/March 2003 issue of the National Safety Council's Injury Insights and will be published in the March 2003 issue of The Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied.
- ☞ Talking on cell phones is the leading cause of crashes that can be attributed to driver distraction according to a report that will be released this week by the California Highway Patrol. "I didn't think cell phones would be the highest category, said Spike Helmick, commander of the CHP. "But I was wrong. We have to be concerned." The study is the first of its kind to focus on the connection between cell phone use and crashes in the state. And even though the overall number of crashes where the device is a factor is low, the study shows that using a cell phone while driving is a safety problem. The problem is expected to get worse as carrying on phone conversations while behind the wheel becomes routine for more and more motorists. State officials said they were able to discover what distracted drivers in 9,000 crashes, almost 18 percent of the crashes that results from driver inattention in 2001. Cell phone use was cited in 891 crashes, or nearly one in 10 incidents. Cell phone use

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was followed closely by fumbling with the radio or CD player, which resulted in 768 crashes. Dealing with children in the car, eating and smoking were other leading causes, but lagged behind the first two.

- ④ Data recorders- or "black boxes"- track car speed, deceleration and other information to help settle car crash disputes, but they have other uses these days, including monitoring teen age drivers. The two general types of black boxes are event data recorders or EDRs — which record the last five seconds of driving information for crash analysis — and those that record information long-term. Many car manufacturers install EDRs behind the dash or in the airbag module. They help airbags know when to deploy. General Motors has been installing event recorders in its vehicles since 1990. It started with a few models, but now it installs them in all models. Some companies sell beefed-up versions for monitoring professional fleets over the long haul. Usually installed under a seat or other out-of-the-way place, the black box measures speed, G-force and whether seat belts are engaged. It can even record whether the automobile's siren and lights were on. A scaled-down version has recently been developed for parents of teens that will sell for about \$280. It will be available online and in some nationwide stores by the end of March. Anyone with the proper equipment could download information.
- ④ The 2003 Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting was held January 12-16 in Washington, DC. To download the special Spotlight on Congestion, Security, and Safety presentation visit the TRB website at [http://gulliver.trb.org/am/ip/assembly\\_detail.asp?id=6792](http://gulliver.trb.org/am/ip/assembly_detail.asp?id=6792).
- ④ New research done by the University of Toronto and NHTSA show that the number of serious car crashes in the United States spikes 4 hours after the Super Bowl which amounts to a 41% increase; 4,000 total collisions on Super Bowl Sunday versus 3,000 on an average day, according to the article "Driving Fatalities on Super Bowl Sunday" in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.