

**California Traffic Safety Summit
San Francisco, CA
April 8, 2009**

Good morning. Thank you, David (Doucette), for your warm welcome. It's great to be in San Francisco. It continues to be one my favorite cities.

I'm pleased to announce that yesterday the Department released its fatality estimates and state-by-state seat belt use numbers for 2008. The 2008 fatality estimates show significant improvements in traffic safety over the last year. These estimates indicate that fatalities will be the lowest on record since 1961. The fatality rate is estimated to be 1.28 in 2008, the lowest on record. We expect to issue the final fatality numbers later this summer.

We continued to see improvements in the seat belt use.

These improvements are a result of the hard work of the highway safety community and the states, with California being among the leaders.

- California ranks among the top five states in the Nation, with 95.7 percent belt use (Michigan was the highest with a 97.2 percent use rate).
- You are a leader in your cooperation in NHTSA's Click it or Ticket and Over the Limit Under Arrest campaigns.
- And your alcohol enforcement programs have proven to be very successful, reducing deaths involving alcohol impairment by 9.2 percent in 2007.

This is great news and I thank you for all that you do in California by making highway safety a continuing priority.

As you all know, we still have a long way to go. Traffic fatalities continue to account for more deaths in the United States for people between the ages of 3-34 (except for age 6) than from any other cause. This remains one of the most significant public health problems facing this nation today.

California is to be commended for the outstanding partnership that exists between the Office of Traffic Safety and the law enforcement community.

- You are leading the way in exploring advanced technologies such as license plate reading devices. These devices can scan hundreds of license plates per hour, greatly increasing the efficiency of identifying improperly or unlicensed drivers.
- You have aggressively implemented alcohol enforcement efforts throughout the state, funding 6 Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors, 6 DUI Courts and almost 1,500 sobriety checkpoints in 2008 – more than any other state. These initiatives are critical to improving traffic safety – since nearly 1/3 of all motor vehicle fatalities involve alcohol.
- California has recently introduced ignition interlock legislation. We hope it passes so you can join the 7 other states that mandate them for all persons convicted of DUI.

We know that driver behavior plays a major role in motor vehicle crashes, and while that is difficult to change, there are things we can do on the vehicle side that can mitigate the consequences of driver error. We believe, with California's alcohol initiatives as the perfect example, that the confluence of behavior modification and advanced technology provides tremendous potential for continued improvement in highway safety.

At NHTSA, we too believe that technology will make a big difference in the fight against impaired driving. In early 2008, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to explore the feasibility, the potential benefits of, and the public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

NHTSA has an agreement with the auto industry to investigate and develop technologies that can accurately and reliably detect alcohol impairment and prevent impaired drivers from starting or operating their vehicle. This will be a long-term effort, but we are hopeful it will produce a technology that is unobtrusive to sober drivers and could be widely installed on a voluntary market-driven basis.

In the meantime, NHTSA supports the use of ignition interlocks as a supplement to traditional impaired driving offender sanctions, such as license suspension and revocation. These devices are up to 90 percent effective in keeping convicted drunk drivers from recommitting the crime. We applaud your efforts to implement the use of ignition interlocks.

With the advancement and reduced costs associated with so many technologies related to sensors, video systems, telematics, global positioning systems and in-vehicle computing capability, we have entered an era when vehicles will have the capability to be vigilant of nearly all types of driver behavior; drowsiness, distraction, or just plain bad judgment and mitigate it.

Technologies already exist that can detect your car's lane position and take action to prevent you from crossing the lane unintentionally or warn you if you are going to cross the lane without your turn signal on. Blind Spot detectors will let you know if you are about to turn into a lane where a vehicle is in your blind spot. Systems such as Forward Collision Warning can detect if you are approaching a car in front of you too quickly and that you are likely to rear-end it if you don't slow down. Building on this further, Crash Imminent Braking can detect that a frontal crash is imminent and will automatically brake your vehicle – if not to avoid the crash, then at least to significantly reduce its severity. Systems that monitor your steering input or your eye glances away from the road in front of you already exist.

These technologies can be very effective, but most of them rely on driver interaction. One such technology that I hope you have heard about is one the most effective and elegant safety technologies to come along in the last 30 years. It is known as electronic stability control (or ESC) and is effective because it doesn't require action on the part of the driver; it automatically activates to keep the vehicle under control. We estimate that when

this technology is available on all vehicles we could prevent up to 10,000 deaths a year. ESC will be required on 100% new vehicles in MY 2011 (September 2010).

We're also looking at the future safety benefits of vehicle-to-vehicle communications. NHTSA has entered into a cooperative agreement with car manufacturers to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of these systems. This is all part of the Department's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program.

With all of these warning and communication systems, NHTSA is conducting human factors research to integrate the advance technologies with driver behavior and responses, so as not to distract the driver unduly.

Secretary LaHood has vowed to keep safety as a top priority for the Department of Transportation and he has vowed to do so in a spirit of collaboration, transparency and accountability.

I'd like to thank California for continuing to be a leader in this regard. I'd especially like to thank Chris Murphy for his leadership as head of the California Office of Traffic Safety and as the immediate past chairman of the Governors Highway Safety Association and his commitment to maintaining a strong partnership between NHTSA and GHSA. I want to thank George Valverde, your DMV Director, for his efforts and support, as well as Commissioner Joe Farrow of the California Highway Patrol. Commissioner Farrow has been a long-time supporter of and participant in NHTSA programs, including the Law Enforcement Challenge and Traffic Safety Strategies for Law Enforcement.

Thank you for your dedication and please keep up the excellent work!