

Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Association for Safer International Road Travel
Annual Gala Fundraiser
Washington, DC
May 23, 2011

Thank you, Andrew (Koblenz), for that warm welcome. And thank you, Rochelle (Sobel) for the invitation to be here. Your initiatives are life-saving, and I am honored to be here to acknowledge and support your work.

Allow me to congratulate ASIRT on all the good work you have been doing for years. Gathering and sharing information so travelers can make better, safer decisions about traveling is a huge benefit in an increasingly mobile world. ASIRT not only provides alerts for any traveler who wants information about travel safety conditions, it also works to establish programs to improve safety in a growing number of nations.

Working collaboratively across the globe is not only productive – it is the best way to make substantial gains in road safety. At NHTSA we believe collaboration with both government and non-governmental partners will yield increased safety benefits.

Along with organizations like ASIRT, we are working with other developed countries to encourage nations that are now rapidly expanding their use of automobiles to take full advantage of lessons learned and the advancements already made elsewhere.

Let me tell you a little bit about where we are in the United States on road safety. NHTSA has been examining our data carefully and taking steps to obtain more accurate and better data to define the scope and nature of crashes, fatalities and injuries.

We just released our regulatory and research plan for 2011-2013. In that plan we identify the programmatic areas on which we must focus our regulatory efforts in the near term. Crash avoidance projects and programs are a priority because they provide the first opportunity to save lives and reduce injuries by preventing crashes from occurring in the first place. But of course, until crashes are eliminated entirely, we will diligently continue our work on maximizing occupant protection for when a crash happens.

It takes time to build a complete safety program, but the latest numbers from our NHTSA data programs tell us we're on target. The numbers are trending downward, and we are moving aggressively to keep them headed in that direction. But nearly 33,000 people killed in one year is a national health problem and we will use every tool at our disposal to save even more lives.

Our data shows that the vast majority of crashes occur because of dangerous behavior, including, driving drunk, driving while distracted, and driving unrestrained. We are hopeful that, along with efforts to build upon our successful outreach, education, and enforcement safety programs, we can harness technology to help mitigate the effects of risky behavior.

We believe we're on the threshold of a new safety era that will revolve around safe vehicle designs and emerging technologies. Crash avoidance technologies provide an opportunity to save lives and reduce injuries by supporting the driver and preventing crashes from occurring in the first place. Some of these technologies include vehicle-to-vehicle communication, as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure communication. We believe vehicle-to-vehicle safety applications could address 80 percent of crash scenarios involving non-impaired drivers.

Other areas of focus on the safety side include motorcycles, rollovers, front-impact occupant protection, side-impact occupant protection, rear-seat occupant protection, pedestrians, children, and older drivers.

As you can see, we are looking at advanced technologies to help us solve our problems. This is not only on the safety side but also for fuel economy and CO2 emissions and we want to share our experience and coordinate with other countries

Our cooperation is evident on the global stage in the World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations, perhaps better known around the world under its acronym WP.29. In little more than 10 years, WP.29 has made tremendous progress in transforming from a European-focused organization into a truly global forum. The work of WP.29 on the harmonization of motor vehicle regulations is absolutely critical to the continued progress on vehicle safety worldwide.

Under the auspices of WP.29, you can find top technical experts from the United States, China, Japan, Korea, India, Thailand, Germany New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Turkey, Slovakia...experts from a total of 31 countries, working together, sharing experience and expertise toward one common goal: to establish global technical regulations for vehicles so that:

- a) we can inform and reassure our consumers that vehicles produced to those regulations are the most advanced in terms of safety, fuel efficiency and environmental protection; and, so that
- b) we all benefit from the ‘state-of-the-art’ data and science-based knowledge by not having to expend resources trying to develop standards and regulations individually.

We found that the best opportunity for establishing harmonized regulations lies in uncharted territory where few have adopted any requirements. As an example, let me point to Electronic Stability Control.

Researchers around the world studied the actual experience of different populations in different driving environments and all came to remarkably similar conclusions about the effectiveness of ESC in real world driving conditions.

This unusually strong body of supporting research led the United States to require ESC as standard equipment in all new light vehicles starting with model year 2012, and to work through WP.29 to adopt a global regulation on ESC.

NHTSA always stands ready to work with its international partners on advanced crash-avoidance technologies and innovation in electric batteries and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, among other issues.

We are now focusing on emerging markets such as China and India that will be exporting growing amounts of automobile and automotive parts. We are establishing cooperative relationships to enlist the aid and enhance the capability of those countries in guarding against defective and unsafe products coming into the United States. By helping both countries establish robust data collection systems, and compliance and defects programs, we not only enhance their population's safety, we protect our citizens here and those traveling abroad.

I just returned from China, where we held good bilateral discussions with several Ministries. Of special note is a historical first meeting with the Ministry of Public Security. This was the first time that an Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration had ever met with this particular Ministry. The Ministry of Public Security is responsible for most traffic safety behavioral interventions and enforcement actions as well as crash data collection and analyses. It is a key player in setting the Chinese Government's strategies to reduce the loss of lives and number of injuries due to road crashes.

Both sides understand – that while we may have some differences due to the unique circumstances of our respective nations – we share the common objective of reducing the personal toll and tremendous economic burden that traffic crashes pose on our societies.

We will continue to work with our partners around the world on meaningful exchanges that will improve safety for our citizens. Traffic safety is at the core of a free and dynamic global community. We must work together to ensure the safety of our people wherever they travel.

The first line of defense in traffic safety will always be personal responsibility. ... Each one of us making good decisions about drinking and driving, restraint use, and employing safe, and defensive driving tactics.

ASIRT embodies this belief. Your work to make travel safer around the world is commendable and we applaud you for your dedication, commitment and efforts to save lives.

###