

**Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Edmunds.com
Annual Safety Conference
Washington, D.C.
May 24, 2011
“Building a Safety Dialogue”**

Good morning. Jeremy (Anwyl), thank you for the invitation to be a part of this important discussion about safety. I live and breathe this topic and it rules my daily life.

The motoring public has come a long way in the last 30 years. Gone are the free-wheeling days of piling into the family vehicle – literally – and barreling down the road at 75 miles per hour: no buckled seat belts, no car seats, no thought of risk of death and injury.

Remember car radios? Two knobs and two choices: AM or FM. That's it. For some, the decision of which vehicle to purchase was based on horsepower, for others, it was affordability.

Today, we know so much more about the dangers of traffic crashes. Parents wouldn't dream of letting their kids ride in the car in anything but their car seat or booster or strapped in with a seat belt. Today, anyone

in the market for a new or used vehicle probably hits the Internet first to research the safety of cars they might want to consider. And some may still look at the horsepower or the coolness factor, but they now check the safety of the vehicle, the crashworthiness, as well.

Edmunds.com does a terrific job of providing information to consumers. I congratulate you on your information store. It is a great resource for consumers. I firmly believe that keeping the public informed is part and parcel of protecting them.

So how did we build a safety culture that demands crashworthy vehicles and frowns on unrestrained kids, and drunk driving, and not wearing a seat belt? It took leadership and constant dialog between the public, the safety advocates, and the government.

We're now on the threshold of a brand new conversation about safety with the public, and it revolves around safe vehicle designs and emerging technologies. It took decades of research to build a foundation of data on which we can make sound regulatory decisions. It took decades to convince the American public that crashworthiness was key, but now we wholly embrace the idea.

We are always looking for the best ways to advance safety. In the crash avoidance area, we mandated electronic stability control, which is expected to greatly reduce the frequency of deadly rollover crashes. Recently, we have imposed new ejection mitigation requirements to greatly increase the chances of survival in serious crashes where ejection is frequently the cause of death.

So what's next? Where do we go from here? NHTSA has been examining our data carefully and taking steps to obtain more accurate and better data to define the frequency 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 believe we should 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.

NHTSA took the lead on this when we rolled out our enhanced government 5-star safety ratings system with the 2011 model year vehicles. To learn more about injuries that can occur in frontal and side crash tests, we've upgraded our family of test dummies.

We're now using crash test dummies of differing sizes that tell us better information about potential injuries. We added small-sized adult female dummies and a new medium-sized adult male dummy. Data from additional body regions are incorporated into our enhanced ratings system.

We established an overall safety score that will combine the star ratings from the frontal impact, side impact, and rollover programs. And, we implemented a program that we hope will encourage the demand for and use of advanced crash avoidance technologies.

As vehicles continue to evolve, our concept of what is safe will change. Tomorrow's generation of drivers will have wholly different expectations of their vehicles than we do.

We've established that the crashworthiness of vehicles is an essential element to help people survive crashes. But our research also tells us that the vast majority of crashes occur because of dangerous behavior. I'm talking about drivers who make poor decisions, including driving drunk, driving while distracted, and speeding, to name a few.

NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Study showed that in about 95 percent of serious crashes driver error was attributed to the event that precipitated the crash. Our outreach to consumers in this area is well-known with our national high visibility enforcement campaigns.

But, NHTSA is also hopeful that we can harness technology to mitigate the effects of these risky behaviors.

It is clear that we cannot regulate or legislate risk away. It's already illegal to engage in any of these dangerous behaviors while behind the wheel, yet people continue to break the law.

Technology is improving our lives and making not only our nation, but making our world a smaller and more connected place. Change and democracy are being fueled by these devices and software, but homework, dates and flash-mobs are being fueled as well. Today's teens and tweens' use of mobile devices are the lifeblood of that generation's entire social experience. You know it, I know it, and we have to address this. This group demands to be connected at all times, and seemingly at all costs. Under Secretary LaHood's leadership, we are engaging them in a conversation about safety and distraction behind the wheel of a vehicle.

But, in addition to reaching out to them, NHTSA is developing an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. Rather than react to every technology as it pops up and becomes a distraction, NHTSA needs a framework that clearly defines the danger zone for the driver — allowing us to keep pace with the industry, rather than playing catch-up.

We will not take a back seat while new dashboard or handheld *infotainment* systems are introduced. These have too great a potential to create more and more distraction for the driver. We are developing guidelines for these systems and expect to release them later this year. We have challenged the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused and safe with their mind on the required task: driving.

Ultimately, it is up to the driver to make safe choices when getting behind the wheel of a vehicle. But manufacturers can help by designing products with safety in mind.

And in the near future, perhaps, the vehicle may step in to help as well. Our Vehicle Communications program includes vehicle-to-vehicle, as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure applications. We are extremely encouraged by the research, analysis of the safety data, and the ongoing human factors work that all point to vehicle-to-vehicle as the next major safety breakthrough. In fact, vehicle-to-vehicle safety applications could address 80 percent of vehicle crash scenarios involving non-impaired drivers.

Data leads us to believe that we have the opportunity to apply these technologies in ways that could

significantly reduce the number of crashes, injuries and fatalities on our roadways.

The success of this program will ultimately rest on the human factors and how the driver interacts with the system: the interface. The interface must produce a quick and appropriate reaction from the driver, yet it cannot increase the potential for distraction.

Any new safety technology will be properly researched before it moves to implementation. The vehicle communication safety applications must be effective at improving safety while not causing unintended consequences. The non-safety applications must be implemented so as not to increase the driver's workload or distraction which could increase the crash risk.

While there is a fully realized revolution in information and vehicle connectivity, there has been an evolution in how automobile systems are managed and maintained. A number of forces have driven more electronic control systems in the vehicle, including safety and fuel economy. And the very questions about these systems rose to a national dialogue with our investigation of Toyota last year.

While there are two groundbreaking studies that have been devoted to the question of unintended acceleration and electronics (The joint NASA/NHTSA study that was completed late last year and the National Academy of Sciences study, which is still underway) the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has already begun the careful work to ensure that these technologies all contribute to creating safer vehicles.

Later this year we will be initiating at least three rulemakings –the first, to require a brake override system. Brake override systems help prevent or lessen certain unintended acceleration incidents by assigning priority to the braking system over the throttle. As noted in the NASA report, brake override systems – and I quote – “provide a broad overarching defense against unintended engine power” from a wide range of causes—not just unintended acceleration.

Second, we will be initiating a rulemaking to standardize operation of keyless ignition systems. Keyless ignition systems can exacerbate unintended acceleration incidents if, for example, the driver cannot quickly shut off the engine.

And, third, we will be initiating a rulemaking to require the installation of event data recorders in all passenger vehicles. Crash investigators can mine event data recorders for information relevant to unintended acceleration incidents that result in crashes.

For the longer term, NHTSA will also begin broad research on the reliability of electronic control systems so that we can continue to ensure future generations of vehicles are safe. With vehicles becoming increasingly reliant on electronic control systems, our knowledge in this area is critical. We will also make sure our staff continues to be well informed about emerging technologies.

NHTSA will also begin research on the placement and design of accelerator and brake pedals, as well as

human factors research such as how drivers use throttle and brake pedals. Pedal misapplication occurs in vehicles across the industry, and we want to know whether these types of incidents can be reduced through better pedal placement and design.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is dedicated to the safety of the American public. We want to serve the public. We want to hear from the public. And we want to keep the public informed. This is how we are building tomorrow's safety dialog.

I want to encourage everyone to visit our website, Safercar.gov, where you can not only report problems and find information about recalls, but you can sign up to be notified about safety recalls that affect your vehicles, tires, and child safety seats.

Highway and traffic safety is more than the name of our agency or the object of our mission. It is the serious responsibility with which the American people have entrusted us.

Thank you.