

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

**Natl. Assoc. of Motor Vehicle Boards and
Commissions
Fall Workshop
Reno, Nevada
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Good afternoon. Thank you, Greg (Kirkpatrick) for the invitation to be here. On behalf of Secretary LaHood, I thank you for your interest in and support of motor vehicle and traffic safety. I look forward to our exchange today.

I hope to leave you today with a big picture look at where we are on vehicle safety, and a better understanding of NHTSA's role in ensuring motor vehicle safety through its standards for both vehicles and vehicle equipment. And lastly, I'll briefly touch on issues we

are watching carefully to determine whether we need to step in.

Everything NHTSA does as an agency revolves around protecting life on our nation's roadways – we are laser-focused on safety.

Safety – specifically highway and vehicle safety – is complex. Safety on the road can be jeopardized by the unsafe behavior of drivers, as well as by the absence of safety features and systems in vehicles. Over the years, NHTSA has built a broad array of programs to address the varied causes of highway deaths and injuries.

Much of the progress we have made over time is predicated squarely on the safety partnerships NHTSA has established and maintained, particularly with the States. We could not have made the progress we have without our State partners.

Our work has been, and will continue to be, based on sound data. Our latest data tells us we're on target with our programs. The numbers are trending downward, and we are moving aggressively to keep them headed in that direction. In 2009, 33,808 people died on our roads and more than 2.2 million

were injured. For 2010, we are estimating that the number killed will drop to 32,788, the smallest number of fatalities on record since 1949. The fatality rate, too, is projected to be the lowest level ever recorded.

This progress comes even as Americans drove a greater number of miles than ever before. The projected decrease in fatalities for 2010 occurred despite an estimated increase of nearly 21 billion miles in national Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). All told, deaths on U.S. highways declined approximately 25

percent over the six year period from 2005 to 2010.

While this is very encouraging, NHTSA will remain vigilant and proactive on all highway safety fronts. We will continue to develop a cross-section of programs that aim to reduce the number of fatalities for each type of crash victim with both Behavioral Safety Programs and Vehicle Safety Programs.

This will be no easy task. Much like technology has made the world smaller and more interconnected, technology and market forces have shaped the automotive industry into

a global player. Consumers in the United States can now choose among vehicles produced in North America, Europe, or Asia. The same thing is true for parts suppliers, with North American, European, and Asian companies supplying original equipment to the vehicles sold in all countries.

Case in point, in 2006, 46 percent of car and truck tires sold in United States were imported; 10 years ago, that figure was just 19 percent. Almost all motorcycle helmets sold, 98 percent, are now imported. The same holds true for significant proportions of lighting equipment

and child safety seats. Leading exporters include China, Japan, Germany, Canada, Mexico, and Korea.

That's where we come in. Our work, as it relates to motor vehicles, includes issuing and enforcing Federal motor vehicle safety standards. These standards prescribe the minimum safety performance requirements for both motor vehicles and for certain types of related equipment. By statute, any motor vehicle made in the United States or imported into the United States for sale in the United States must meet these standards.

The list of equipment covered by our standards is long, and includes tires, lighting equipment, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, to name but a few.

We have a total of 60 motor vehicle standards, and if someone wants to bring a vehicle or a piece of equipment that is subject to one of these standards into our country, they need to be able to certify that it is manufactured to that standard.

When it comes to vehicles, in general, they can be imported without restriction if they are manufactured to conform to all our

applicable safety, bumper, and theft prevention standards – and if they bear a certification label to that effect. The label must be permanently affixed to the vehicle by the manufacturer.

By affixing the label to the vehicle, the manufacturer is stating that the vehicle complies with all applicable Federal motor vehicle standards in effect on the date of manufacture.

Note that the certification is, by statute, performed by the manufacturer and not by NHTSA.

But there is a growing segment of the motor vehicle industry that we

are watching. This segment includes two types non-traditional vehicles I have have significant safety concerns regarding the expansion of the types of usage and environments they are utilized in.

By law, NHTSA’s jurisdiction is limited to “motor vehicles,” and these are defined in the United States Code as vehicles driven or drawn by mechanical power that are manufactured primarily for use on public streets, roads, and highways.

Mini-trucks are originally manufactured for on-road use in

their home countries and are treated as “motor vehicles” subject to applicable standards of those countries . In the past, NHTSA has allowed newly manufactured mini-trucks with maximum speed capabilities that do not exceed 25 mph to be imported as off-road vehicles, for use on industrial sites, college campuses, and other closed compounds. They are not certified to any U.S. safety standards.

In just the last three or four years, sixteen (16) States have adopted laws permitting mini-trucks to be titled or registered on roads whose posted speeds range from 35 mph in

some states to 55 and even 65 mph in other States. So we are re-examining our policies and interpretations regarding these vehicles.

Finally, I want to mention low-speed vehicles. We define these as 4-wheeled motor vehicles that can reach a speed of more than 20 miles per hour in a mile, but cannot go over 25 mph on a paved level surface and with gross vehicle weight ratings of less than 3,000 lbs.

We require these vehicles to be equipped with headlamps, front and rear turn signal lamps, tail lamps,

stop lamps, reflex reflectors, and either two exterior mirrors, or one driver's side exterior mirror and an interior mirror. These vehicles must also come equipped with a parking brake, a windshield that conforms to the correct standard, and a VIN. A low speed vehicle must also come with a Type 1 or Type 2 seat belt defined by our standard at each designated seating position.

These are the only federal requirements that apply to low speed vehicles—they are not required to meet the host of other standards that apply, for instance, to passenger cars. Our decision not

to require compliance with those other standards was premised on low speed vehicles being used only in restricted environments with low speed limits (25-30 mph). Low speed vehicles are not suited for use on roads with higher posted limits or in the normal traffic mix encountered in most of our cities and towns. Because they do not meet the many standards that apply to vehicles intended for such use, low speed vehicles should not be permitted to be used in these circumstances.

As you can see, our compliance and enforcement activities are fairly

broad in scope and gaining in complexity as the marketplace changes. We will continue our vigilance and activities to fulfill our mission of saving lives on the American roadway. The loss of more than 32,000 people in traffic-related crashes in a single year represents a serious public health problem to our Nation. NHTSA will keep making gains in lives saved by using all the tools at our disposal.

The Secretary of Transportation made safety a priority for the Department and he has delivered on that promise. As the highway traffic

safety agency, we take that duty seriously. Thank you.

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