

**Remarks Prepared for  
David Strickland, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
National Tribal Transportation Safety Summit  
Prior Lake, MN  
August 30, 2012**

**I am honored to join you today and pleased to have been able to hear from your session leaders this morning.**

**Before I begin I want to acknowledge the passing of Chairman Stanley R. Crooks. Chairman Crooks was a national figure and a passionate voice for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community for more than 20 years. The loss of a great leader is always**

**shocking, yet the best among us have a way of motivating the next generation to advance the work even further. Stanley Crooks will be missed, yet his example will surely inspire new leaders to step forward.**

**I applaud all of you for the work you're doing and for the comprehensive scope of this Transportation Safety Summit. I understand that for the first time this conference includes the 4Es: Engineering, Enforcement, Education, and EMS. I've been looking forward to coming here to speak with you about highway safety issues, and to listen.**

**At the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration we obsess about safety every day. We've designed programs that deal with both behavioral and vehicle-**

**related causes of highway crashes, injuries, and deaths.**

**Our programs are based on accurate data, sound science, and careful engineering. We use that science and data to inform our decisions about how to reduce traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries on U.S. highways.**

**We're constantly working on improving vehicle design to help people survive crashes. We test vehicles, we introduce new safety features. We recall cars that have problems. But the fact is that the vast majority of highway fatalities occur because of risk-taking and dangerous behavior.**

**Too many drivers throughout the U.S. make the same bad decisions over and over: They choose to drive**

**under the influence, drive too fast, not wear a seatbelt, and not secure their young children in a car seat or buckle them up. Many drivers, and especially young people, are also distracting themselves by texting, surfing the Internet, or talking on cellphones when they should be focused on driving. That kind of behavior has deadly consequences.**

**In fact, we know that 95 percent of highway fatalities are the result of drivers making poor decisions. And when we look at the data nationwide, we see that folks in rural areas are overrepresented in those same key areas.**

**Obviously the many challenges of rural communities are no surprise to you: Speeds are higher; roads are less forgiving; visibility is lower at night; belt use is lower and impaired driving is higher due to the**

**perception of lower risk of arrest; more pickup trucks and SUVs—vehicles with higher roll over rates; and longer emergency response time. These factors are also reflected in many rural Tribal communities.**

**Data is the lifeblood of our safety mission at NHTSA. We know that U.S. traffic fatalities have been steadily declining over the last five years since reaching a peak in 2005. Highway deaths have decreased by 26 percent from 2005 to 2011. However, the fact remains that 32,885 people were killed in U.S. motor vehicle crashes in 2010. Those numbers are unacceptable and we're working aggressively to reduce them.**

**Accurate data can be the gateway to safety for rural and Tribal communities. Tribes that develop solid data collection systems can use the data to review**

**and analyze their own crashes. That process can support a comprehensive Tribal community-based approach to addressing impaired driving, seat belt use, speeding, and other traffic-related issues that contribute to injuries and deaths.**

**At NHTSA, we're working with other Federal partners to offer more coordinated programs and resources to support Tribal Traffic Safety and Injury prevention efforts. By developing partnerships with agencies such as the BIA, Indian Health Services, CDC, and FHWA who are already charged with providing services and support to Tribal communities we can more effectively and efficiently provide technical assistance and opportunities to share evidence-based best practice information.**

**One avenue recently used to share best practices was the National Lifesavers Conference, which included workshops addressing Native American issues and initiatives. NHTSA, along with BIA, Indian Health Services, CDC, and FHWA sponsored Tribal representatives to participate and share their experiences for the past two years.**

**Due to the rural nature of Tribal communities it is sometimes difficult to provide sufficient law enforcement coverage for DWI enforcement. Four mobile breath testing units—called BAT mobiles—were provided through the BIA for use by the Tribes to address the limited availability of breath testing equipment and holding facilities. These units increase the amount of time an officer can be on DWI patrols and check points—a need identified by a Tribal Law Enforcement Advisory committee.**

**In addition to being deployed during the National Impaired Driving Crackdown around Labor Day each year, these units are also used to support the “Don’t Shatter the Dreams” high visibility enforcement mobilization and awareness campaign conducted during the December holidays each year. This campaign was created by Native Americans to encourage Tribal support and participation. More than 40 Tribes participate in this campaign each December.**

**I want to thank the Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian Highway Safety Program (IHSP) for their partnership and renewed efforts to efficiently provide resources to the Tribes to conduct effective traffic safety programs. The additional resources provided through**

**the IHSP make a difference in Indian Country every day.**

**Finally, I challenge everyone here today, when you return to your communities, to renew your commitment to traffic safety. Your tribe will benefit from it and you will be better for it as well.**

**Thank you.**