

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

Mothers Against Drunk Driving Annual Conference

Washington, DC

September 24, 2010

“Working Together for a Safer Future”

**Good morning. Thank you Laura (Dean-Mooney) and
Kimberley (Earle). It is my pleasure to join you as
Mothers Against Drunk Driving celebrates 30 years of
making a difference.**

You've put in 30 years of ground breaking work – and you are still going strong. From the persistence of the determined, passionate few, you now number in the thousands. And you share with those determined few the belief that you can change the world — because you have.

The national organization that MADD is today continues to make a difference. MADD today still understands the power of grassroots and the impact of national clout. You stand on the foundation of a strong legacy, and it is vital you honor and continue this work.

At the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration, we are extremely grateful for your continued dedication to safety on our nation's roadways, and your ongoing support of and involvement with many of the Department's drunk driving, and other safety programs.

As you heard Deputy Secretary Porcari say earlier today, we have some good news to tell on highway safety. The rate of deaths on our roadways continues to decline. In 2009, highway deaths fell to 33,808, the smallest number since 1950. Fatality and injury rates fell to the lowest levels ever recorded.

And this progress comes even as Americans drove a greater number of miles. It's a remarkable accomplishment – a landmark achievement for public health and safety.

Nationally, alcohol-impaired driving fatalities dropped 7.4 percent, from 11,711 in 2008 to 10,839 deaths in 2009. But national numbers don't tell the whole story. Drunk driving is a community problem, and although we have experienced progress the last few years, much more still needs to be done all over America.

Our new data shows that 33 States and Puerto Rico mirrored the national trend, with decreases in the

number of alcohol-impaired driving deaths. However, the rest of the States showed an increase in the number of alcohol-impaired driving deaths.

We are encouraged by the decline in motorcycle deaths. There are still too many riders dying on the road, but following 11 consecutive years of increases, 2009 saw that number drop to 4,462, a decline of 16 percent from 2008. Just as importantly, we also saw a decline in the number of alcohol-impaired rider fatalities in motorcycle crashes – down 16 percent to 1,314 in the same period.

Some of you may be wondering if the economic downturn has had an effect on safety. While more vehicles than ever are on our streets and highways – and while Americans are driving those vehicles a greater number of miles – we believe that “discretionary driving” is on the decline.

Because of the economic downturn, fewer people may be going out for after-work or evening entertainment, which the data suggest are higher-risk trips than the daily commute.

So, when the economy rebounds, will the number of motor vehicle crashes rebound too?

They may.

But while it is true that fatalities and injuries tend to decline during periods of economic contraction, they – historically – have never come all the way back up.

This is good news.

But it's not an excuse to rest on our laurels.

The Nation is building momentum. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, you have helped us build this momentum. And as any good strategist will tell you,

now is the time to redouble our efforts. Decades of experience with both seat belts and drunk driving has taught us it takes consistency in leadership to improve highway safety.

It takes consistency in leadership to improve highway safety. It takes leadership from elected officials at all levels of government. It takes consistently comprehensive strategies, public education, effective enforcement and adjudication. And very importantly, it takes grassroots advocacy, to improve safety performance.

So while I congratulate you on 30 strong years of effecting change, I urge you to not stop doing what you are doing because we're making progress. Don't stop doing what you are doing because the real story of your success is so much more than just numbers. Your work changes lives. And it changes lives in meaningful and powerful ways.

MADD's work, our work, will be even more critical in the years ahead. We are going to build from here by continuing to push for the adoption of effective countermeasures, both behavioral and vehicle based.

We are as committed as ever to eliminating this deadly crime on our roadways. State and local enforcement officials are the cornerstone of the Department's safety program, and we plan to continue to support them with national campaigns and other resources to combat drunk driving.

We just concluded part one of our 2010 "Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest." campaign, and have an extremely robust campaign for part two in December, leading up to the holidays.

We will continue to collaborate with you – the Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving, for example.

With this campaign, you helped reinvigorate the fight against drunk driving. And you challenged everyone to use all the tools at our disposal—including technology.

In the next few weeks, we will be holding a National Ignition Interlock Summit. MADD has been relentless in pushing for State adoption of first offender interlocks, and we are starting to see momentum on that front. Twelve States now make interlocks mandatory – or highly incentivized – for all offenders. We hope that our summit will clear the path for more states to make such progress.

In addition, NHTSA has partnered with automobile manufacturers to develop a non-intrusive, inexpensive, and reliable technology that can determine whether a driver is impaired. DADSS, or Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, will prevent an impaired driver from operating a vehicle, once it has determined the driver is impaired.

We will finish the laboratory development of DADSS and the verification on three prototypes later this year.

We will then move to conducting the research focused on integrating and demonstrating this technology in a vehicle.

Another tool we're moving on is the Data Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety, or DDACTS.

The Agency worked with the Department of Justice to develop this program to combat both crime and traffic crashes. By using DDACTS, jurisdictions can use geo-mapping to pinpoint areas with both high crime and frequent traffic crashes, and then target existing law enforcement resources to these areas.

From six demonstration sites that started using the DDACTS approach, there are now more than 20.

Early evidence suggests it works. These sites have seen a reduction of crashes and crime. NHTSA and DOJ

are actively promoting the DDACTS approach to other communities and providing technical assistance.

As part of our work to reduce the risks to younger drivers, we are working with law enforcement, alcohol control boards, and the hospitality industry to make sure we reduce teen access to alcohol. Although teens are not allowed to consume any amount of alcohol, 17 percent of drivers aged 16 to 20 involved in fatal crashes in 2008 were impaired. We have to do better.

We will continue to work with and encourage the alcohol industry to be responsible community partners by supporting safety belt and child safety seat laws,

**strong impaired driving laws and programs,
graduated driver licensing provisions, effective server
training programs and designated driver programs for
adults, as well as other traffic safety initiatives.**

**I know you share our view that we won't be satisfied
until our communities are safe from this deadly crime.**

**We will not be satisfied until innocent, decent, law-
abiding people are safe from tragic injuries and loss of
their loved ones because someone makes the
irresponsible choice to drive while impaired.**

**It's hard to believe that it wasn't always possible to
throw the book at drunk drivers. A time when a**

drunk driving offense would earn you a ticket, maybe. Thanks to people like the dedicated individuals in this room and organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and thanks to countless hours of hard work and sacrifice by thousands, we have changed that.

It seems appropriate and fitting at this time to recognize the law enforcement community. A life of service means sacrifice, long hours, and dangerous working conditions. These officers put their lives on the line, every day, enforcing traffic laws on every type of road from major interstates to the streets in your local neighborhoods. That's one of the reasons why

NHTSA is supporting a Law Enforcement Institute at this year's MADD National Conference. Another reason is that law enforcement efforts serve as the foundation for effective community programs aimed at fighting impaired driving.

Please join me in recognizing our law enforcement community. (APPLAUSE)

Eliminating drunk driving from our nation's roadways will continue to be a top priority for the Department of Transportation. We will continue to work with our State and safety partners on a

comprehensive approach to this complex issue. And we will continue to use and look for every resource at our disposal.

We will continue to use education, outreach, law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and technology – all powerful and versatile tools – to make highways safer. But the first line of defense will always be personal responsibility ... Each one of us stepping forward to do our part. Your initiatives are life-saving, and have made a real impact on a crisis that has torn apart far too many families.

I am honored to be here to acknowledge and support your work. Thank you. ###