

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

**National Association of Attorneys General  
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**Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here again. I'm wearing a different hat, these days, than the last time I participated in your seminar, but my interest in this topic has not diminished. To the contrary, the topic of consumer protection rules my daily life.**

**The core value in NHTSA's mission is the protection of the American public – the American consumer. And I'm energized by the possibilities unfolding for the Department of Transportation and NHTSA to reach new levels of service and protection of that public.**

**That energy stems directly from a new way of thinking at the Department and in Washington. It is time for new solutions. We must broaden our approach to solving our safety issues.**

**The President set the pace and the example. He has proposed a transformative U.S. transportation policy that improves public health and safety, fosters livable communities, promotes infrastructure repair and long-term economic competitiveness, while achieving environmental sustainability.**

**This translates into Federal support for more transportation choices, more public transportation, and more commercial and residential development around transportation hubs.**

**That includes roads, rails, and transit and safer passage for pedestrians and bicyclists. Of course that extends to how we power our cars and trucks. We want our vehicles to be as fuel efficient as possible.**

**NHTSA, working with the Environmental Protection Agency, delivered on President Obama's call for a strong and coordinated national policy for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles, and we did so in a way that does not compromise safety. We published the final rule on CAFE last month.**

**So that is the change from the top down. But we all know that automobiles still play an essential role in our lives and our livelihoods and probably will for the foreseeable future. Here in the United States, our love affair with the automobile rages on. I confess, I am one of the motor heads.**

**But I'm also a child of the Information Age, and a bit of a techno-geek – all of which fits right in with the President's commitment to transparency and accountability in government. Equipping the public with information is part and parcel of helping to protect them.**

**For example: We are on track to roll out our enhanced government 5-star safety ratings system with the 2011 model year vehicles. For the new ratings, we made changes to the existing front and side crash ratings programs.**

**We added a family of crash test dummies and a side impact pole test to increase occupant safety. We established an overall safety score that will combine the star ratings from the front, side, and rollover programs. Finally, the Agency also implemented a program that we hope will encourage the demand for and use of advanced crash avoidance technologies.**

**And we are planning a communications program to tell the American public what it all means. We want them to understand why some of the new ratings are lower but more rigorous, and that those lower star ratings do not mean the vehicles are less safe than they were a year ago.**

**We want the consumer to embrace crash avoidance technologies as a way to make them safer. We want terms like electronic stability control, lane departure warning, and forward collision warning to become part of the consumer's lexicon and comfort level.**



**We're working hard to make our information accessible and user-friendly. We've completely redesigned NHTSA.gov. You should check it out — it is a fantastic redesign. And we'll be re-setting Safercar.gov in step with our new consumer information campaign for the improved 5-Star Safety Ratings.**

**I think we are headed in the right direction, but as with any change, there will be new challenges that arise. For example, as we move to hybrid electric vehicles in an effort to diminish our reliance on oil, we are creating a much quieter fleet.**

**A quieter fleet could potentially put pedestrians at risk, especially blind pedestrians. NHTSA is currently conducting a research program on quieter cars and the safety of blind pedestrians.**

**Our initial analysis shows that hybrid electric vehicles do have a significantly higher incidence rate of pedestrian crashes than internal combustion engine vehicles for certain maneuvers—like slowing or stopping, backing up, entering or leaving a parking space and making a turn.**

**We are beginning work on phase 2 of this project, intended to assess how we might require vehicles to emit a base level of sound at low speeds to provide some level of identification to pedestrians that a vehicle is approaching. We think that to be effective, this sound has to be readily identifiable as a vehicle.**

**Technology is headed for an intersection on the behavioral side of traffic safety as well, and it will pose some huge questions for us as a society. I believe this intersection of behavior modification and technology enhancement provides tremendous potential for continued and accelerated improvement in highway safety performance.**

**But, when we get there, we will have to address the question of common safety versus individual privacy.**

**For example, we are very hopeful that technology will make a big difference in the fight against impaired driving as well.**

**In early 2008, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to explore the feasibility, the potential benefits of, and the public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.**

**We are seeking to develop technologies that can accurately and reliably detect alcohol impairment and prevent impaired drivers from starting or operating their vehicle. Rather than focusing on police detecting and arresting impaired drivers on the road, this effort seeks to prevent impaired driving from occurring by preventing an impaired driver from operating the vehicle.**

**This will be a long-term effort – but we are hopeful it will produce a technology that is completely invisible to the driver and could be widely installed on a voluntary, market-driven basis. Our task then, becomes selling this idea to the public.**

**We will leverage our track record of reaching out to consumer to broaden the safety dialog with the consumer to include new topics such as this one.**

**And we will continue to engage the consumer with information on the behavioral side, too. Drivers and other road users must take an active role in safety—their own and that of those sharing the road. Vehicle occupants need to buckle up and keep focused on the task of driving. Technologies may be able to detect the presence of vulnerable road users, but both they and the vehicle drivers need to be on the lookout for each other.**

**Take for example, the issue of Distracted Driving.**

**Distracted Driving is dangerous – almost 6000 lives lost in 2008 alone due to all types of distractions – and we are determined to put an end to it.**

**In fact, I can tell you, the Secretary of Transportation is on a rampage about Distracted Driving. Last fall, the Department held a summit on Distracted Driving. It was the first in the Nation to call Federal attention to this dangerous problem, and propose a range of realistic solutions.**

**We recently unveiled sample legislation that States can use as a starting point to craft laws prohibiting texting while driving.**



**Hopefully, this will help all the State legislatures currently considering such laws to move forward.**

**So far, 26 States plus D.C. have texting laws covering all drivers – Kansas became the 26<sup>th</sup> State earlier this year, pending final signature on the bill by Governor Mark Parkinson. That’s a good start, but we’ve got to do better. I know lawmakers around the country are studying this seriously.**

**On the outreach side, we're sponsoring a website, [distraction.gov](http://distraction.gov), which acts as a national clearinghouse for information on distracted driving. It also makes our position on Distracted Driving clear, and it details our commitment to work across the spectrum with private and public entities as well as advocacy groups to tackle Distracted Driving.**

**I am very encouraged by the momentum that is building against Distracted Driving. My intent is for NHTSA to develop 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 NHTSA to keep pace with the industry, rather than playing catch-up.**

**We will not take a back seat while new dashboard *infotainment* systems are introduced. These have too great a potential to create more and more distraction for the driver. As part of our NHTSA Distraction Plan we will be taking a hard look at developing guidelines or requirements for these systems. I am challenging the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving.**

**As I said at the beginning, I believe in NHTSA's consumer protection mission. To fulfill that mission, I expect us to be active and pro-active. And I believe we are putting the right framework in place to strengthen our Nation and our industry and protect the American consumer. Thank you.**