

THE PUBLIC FAVORS A STRONG GOVERNMENT ROLE IN HIGHWAY SAFETY

Who should be responsible for setting the standards in how well motor vehicles protect passengers in a crash -- the government or manufacturers? Most Americans (67 percent) think that the government should set the standards, according to a recent national telephone survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

In November and December of 1995, about 4,000 randomly selected persons aged 16 and older from across the nation participated in the *NHTSA 1995 Customer Satisfaction Survey*. The results of the survey confirm that safety ranks high in purchase decisions and that the public prefers a strong role for government in setting standards for safety in vehicles. Virtually the entire public support minimum safety standards for vehicle features including brakes, gas tanks, headlights, safety belts, and crashworthiness. Most believe the government should provide information to consumers and promote safe driving behaviors.

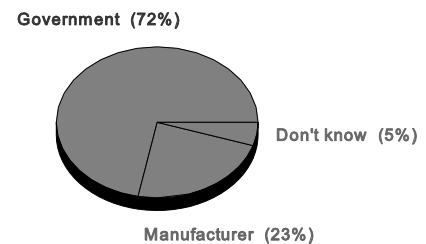
Safety Standards

When asked who should set the standards for crashworthiness, the public favors the government over auto manufacturers by better than a 2-to-1 margin (67 to 27 percent). For vehicle safety equipment, the margin increases to 3-to-1 (72 to 23 percent) in favor of the government. More than four-fifths (81 percent) believe that safety standards should be the same for all states, rather than each state setting its own standards. Most (89 percent) support federal government enforcement to recall vehicles for safety-related defects.

National Hotline

As consumers, most Americans (90 percent) say it is very important to have information about vehicles that have been recalled for safety defects. Most (73

percent) think it's very important to have a national hotline where drivers can report safety defects, and another 21 percent think it's somewhat important. About half (47 percent) recommend that



In general, do you think that standards for safety equipment in motor vehicles should be set by the government or left to the manufacturer?

the government run the hotline, 28 percent suggest that automobile manufacturers run it, while 13 percent think an independent laboratory should take the responsibility.

Only 27 percent know or guess that a national hotline exists for reporting defects. In 1995, NHTSA handled 809,496 calls to the *Auto Safety Hotline* at 1-800-424-9393. The NHTSA hotline also provides information on topics like drinking and driving, children's safety seats, and safety belts, but only 20 percent know that such a hotline exists for these purposes.

Crash Tests of Vehicles

About two-thirds responded *yes* when asked if the government conducts crash tests of vehicles to check their safety, but most of these had no idea which government agency does the work. The correct answer is NHTSA, which issues crashworthiness

information based on the results of crash tests of many different vehicles each year.

Increase Public Information and Education and Driver Education Programs

Across all ages, Americans (82 percent) believe that the number of serious injuries in motor vehicle crashes could be reduced by more public education. They believe that much of the crash problem is related to driving behavior. They would like to see increased public education in drinking and driving, drugs and driving, reckless driving, running stop lights and signs, speeding, and tailgating, among other topics.

Most (86 percent) of those aged 16 and older consider driver education courses very important in training new drivers to drive safely, and two-thirds think the federal government should provide financial support for high school driver education programs.

Support for Government Activities

The public considers it very important for the federal government to conduct specific education programs, and conduct research and regulatory activities. At the top of the list is public education campaigns to reduce drunk driving, closely followed by those to increase child car seat use. They believe the government should require manufacturers to improve safety features, and that the government should regulate the safety of heavy trucks, and conduct research on motor vehicle safety.

The public believes the major responsibilities of the government should be education, regulation, enforcement, and research. These are NHTSA's primary activities, but the survey suggests that the public is not aware of government safety-related services, or who provides them. NHTSA is using the information from this survey to improve service to our customers.

To obtain a copy of the report, *NHTSA 1995 Customer Satisfaction Survey*, write to the Office of Program Development and Evaluation, NHTSA, NTS-30, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 366-7096. Alan Block was the contract manager for this project.

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