

# THE ACUTE PROBLEMS OF SAFETY ON OUR STREETS AND HIGHWAYS

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## 1. Current Situation--

Traffic fatalities for the first four months of 1950 show a sharp reversal of the downward trend since May of 1946 and have turned sharply upward. The death record for April was higher than for any prior April. In the four months, January, February, March and April, the number of fatalities increased 980--11 per cent over the same months of 1949.

### Motor-Vehicle Deaths and Death Rates 1948, 1949 and 1950 Total United States

<u>Month</u>	<u>1948</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1948-50</u> <u>Change</u>	<u>1949-50</u> <u>*Change</u>
January . . . . .	2,190	2,340	2,430	+11%	+ 4%
February . . . . .	2,120	2,010	2,190	+ 3%	+ 9%
March . . . . .	2,210	2,120	2,440	+10%	+15%
April . . . . .	2,210	2,320	2,710	+23%	+17%
Four Months . . . . .	8,730	8,790	9,770	+12%	+11%
May . . . . .	2,770	2,470			
June . . . . .	2,530	2,400			
July . . . . .	2,810	2,780			
August . . . . .	3,010	2,800			
September . . . . .	3,080	3,020			
October . . . . .	3,270	3,110			
November . . . . .	2,980	2,980			
December . . . . .	3,080	3,150			
Total . . . . .	32,259	31,500			

\* Note percentage increase by months.

Motor vehicle manufacture is expected to reach 7 million this year for the first time. Dollar value of gasoline sales for the first quarter of this year is 25 per cent greater than the corresponding period of 1949. Motor vehicle registration has jumped from 31,035,420 in 1945 to 44,670,588 in 1949. Vehicle miles of travel has increased from 261 billion in 1945 to 425 billion in 1949.

Fatality rates for the first quarter of 1950 vary all the way from 3.8 per hundred million vehicle miles of travel in Minnesota to 11.3 in South Carolina.

The critical situation in the rural areas is indicated by the following figures:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Deaths</u>	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>
1946	33,420	12,400	21,020
1947	32,690	11,450	21,240
1948	32,000	10,500	21,500
1949	31,500	9,100	22,400

## 2. The Action Program--

### President's Highway Safety Conference.

Because of the alarming increase of highway traffic accidents during the early months of 1946, the President called the conference of May 1946 to formulate a Nation-wide program for saving lives and halting the destruction of property.

Two major premises governed the organization of the conference, guided the discussions and determined the accepted plan to attack the problem. These are,

First: The only possible hope to achieve and to maintain a desirable level of traffic safety is through the

leadership and organized activities of the State governments and their local subdivisions; and

Second: The methods, laws and pattern of organization needed for accident prevention are known and have been perfected far beyond their consistent application and enforcement.

Upon these foundation principles the Action Program was firmly based.

The Action Program sharply focuses the essential activities in each of the eight major fields of traffic accident prevention. Each of these fields is discussed in detail in the eight technical committee reports. The program has been given widespread distribution running into the thousands of copies every year since 1946 and is believed to be in the hands of every State official in the United States. The reports have been considered and revised in the light of current conditions annually for each of the past four years.

The conference advocates a balanced continuing program, yet recognizes that all devices and techniques quickly available in every field must be brought into use immediately to curb the rapid rise in fatalities experienced during the first four months of 1950. For example, the police, courts and other enforcement agencies can step up their efforts immediately. Similarly, improvements in signs, signals and pavement markings can be made immediately by all engineering jurisdictions.

### 3. State Leadership is Paramount--

The urgency of controlling the evil forces of traffic destruction is alarmingly clear in the statistics quoted. The only effective attack upon the problem is the uncompromising and universal application of the Action Program outlined by the President's Highway Safety Conference. The recommended Action Program is carefully reviewed and brought up to date by a conference each year.

This can best be done by each State but cannot be effectively carried out without proper organization under the leadership of the Governor.

The first step is the appointment of an active coordinating committee of the responsible officials headed by the Governor.

At least a dozen States currently do not have coordinating committees and there are others which have them on paper only.

The second step in organization is a State-wide conference to put machinery in motion which will result in an effective public support group. Several States have never held conferences. At the same time, other States have held conferences but have not effectively put into operation the plans developed. Still other States have annual conferences and are carrying forward a concerted program.

The first job for the coordinating committee is to make a realistic appraisal of what elements of the Action Program are now in effect in the State. The errors in the program should be immediately corrected.

In many States this will require more manpower facilities and authority which means the State's program and needs must be determined in time to present them to the session of the State legislature in 1951.

The highest priority requirements of the Action Program are:

Laws and Ordinances.--A comprehensive and detailed comparison of the State motor vehicle laws with the Uniform Vehicle Code is the first required step toward uniformity in motor vehicle laws. It is a prerequisite to sound motor vehicle legislation in every State, which is equally true of the Model Traffic Ordinance.

Enforcement.--Two things stand out in the broad field of enforcement. The need for additional highway patrolmen is universal. The most urgent need in the whole highway safety movement is improvement in the rural courts.

Motor Vehicle Administration.--Every motor vehicle department needs an adequate budget and the required number of qualified personnel for a sound system of driver licensing to meet at least the minimum standards provided for in Act II of the Uniform Code, to provide a minimum standard for driver examination as recommended by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, to provide for training of examiners and to emphasize re-examination of drivers who are involved in accidents and to take the required disciplinary action for those who violate traffic laws.

Engineering.--Legislation and administrative encumbrances to State highway departments participating in the solution of highway safety problems in local jurisdictions need to be removed.

Those departments already vested with adequate authority need to show more interest, initiative, energy, and action in a truly State-wide engineering attack on traffic accidents. Broad-scale planning and research investigations must reveal the way to safer highway transportation to the extent the physical facilities are determining.

Accident Records.--Accident records are as elementary to accident prevention as fiscal records are to the financial success of a business enterprise. Accident records will never be had without support of the Governor. It is essential that a definite budget for the accident records bureau, large enough to provide equipment and facilities needed and to staff the bureau with trained personnel (at least one for every 1,500 accidents reported annually) be provided.

Education.--School safety programs from kindergarten through college teacher training need to be extended to the point where they will involve all children in every school.

Public Information.--It is imperative to the success of any State-wide traffic safety program that it have public support. This can only be had by keeping the public fully informed on how, where, why and when accidents occur. While all public information media have been found to be cooperative in this respect, the public official remains the source of authentic information.

4. The Governor of Each State Holds the Key to Action Upon the Action Program--

Listed here are only the most salient points which are dependent upon State executive leadership and action above everything else. Each of these points is fully elaborated in the Action Program and completely covered in the individual Technical Committee reports. Every recommendation highlighted here and included in the Action Program has been proven sound by saving lives and reducing accidents somewhere.

The President's Highway Safety Conference has had the active support of the Governors' Conference and the Council of State Governments. Each year the Chairman of the Governors' Conference has taken an active part. In 1948 Governor Hildreth, then Chairman of the Governors' Conference, expressed complete support of the organization in reaching the objectives of the Safety Conference. In the succeeding years the Chairman of the Governors' Conference has served effectively as Vice Chairman of the Safety Conference. In this capacity Governor Caldwell, Governor Lane and Governor Carlson have each contributed leadership and authoritative support reflecting the highest ideals of the whole membership of the Governors' Conference. Many other Governors have taken part in the discussions, presided at regional group meetings and sponsored State-wide highway safety conferences. Perhaps the single most encouraging action that has been taken is the vigorous expression relative to traffic safety in the resolution of the Governors' Conference at Colorado Springs last year. The key to encouraging and productive action lies within the authority of each Governor.