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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF
TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON PASSIVE RESTRAINT AT THE GENERAL
MOTORS PROVING GROUNDS, MILFORD, MICHIGAN
ON MONDAY, MAY 11, 1970

I'm privileged and honored to be here at this splendid facility which
General Motors has generously placed at our disposal to help inaugurate
this first International Conference on Passive Restraint Systems.

This is my second trip to the G-M Proving Grounds. I was here last
in January, and I saw the impact sled tests that you will see later this
morning; I saw the full scale crash test area that you will visit this afternoon.
I have also visited the Chrysler and Ford test facilities and research labs --
I am well aware of the dramatic steps forward that have been made by our
domestic auto manufacturers.

I know the expertise you will be exposed to here is of great value and
can save many lives.

The NATO Committee on Challenges to Modern Society could not have
chosen a more timely issue for mutual cooperation.

The consequences of your deliberations and discussions here will be of
great practical, lifesaving importance to those growing millions worldwide
who must rely on automotive transportation. And in the advanced countries
of Europe, Asia, and the American continents, that means just about all of
us at one time or another.

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This is truly a conference without precedent in the history of international transportation. For the first time, the automotive manufacturers of 15 nations will be openly sharing information of immense market value in order to achieve an objective of great public interest. Certainly your meeting here has major implications for international trade. The sharing of technical data for airbags, now that we have issued a formal proposed notice of rulemaking, should be of key importance to all of you.

As Doug Toms and Dr. Moynihan both stated in Europe last month, we are prepared to turn over passive restraint technology to all participants in the NATO Committee's program. And as Dr. Moynihan pointed out in a recent interview, (and I quote him) "If we didn't take this initiative at this point in sharing this knowledge, we would, in effect, be excluding foreign automobiles from our market in 1972."

Let's take a quick look at what we are calling for in the way of passive restraint systems.

First of all, the timetable: We want these systems to be optional equipment for passenger cars produced after January 1, 1972. We want them to be mandatory equipment for those manufactured in 1973.

1972 models not equipped with passive restraint devices should have as standard equipment, a new type seat belt which is designed for easier fastening and which provides greater protection. The belts would be required -- as would the air bags -- to protect automobile occupants against injury in crashes against a stationary barrier at speeds up to 30 miles an hour. We feel that the one-year grace period before passive restraint systems become mandatory is necessary in order for devices to be manufactured in sufficient quantity.

Our Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was published in the Federal Register last Thursday -- May 7 -- and we will hear comments from interested parties at a June 24 meeting in Washington. Written comments and data must be submitted by June 10.

As you can see, we are pushing with the utmost feasible speed the installation of passive restraint devices in all motor vehicles.

We are doing this for one reason -- and for one reason only. To save lives.

You know and I know that one of the most dismal commentaries on the progress of 20th century civilization has been the appalling death toll on the highways of the world.

As a nation that plays a leadership role in the worldwide automotive industry, we felt it incumbent upon ourselves to take positive action.

Our goal is to transform the automobile from a vehicle causing injury and death in the event of a crash -- into a protective shield which guards against injury and death even when crashes occur.

The rising curve of highway fatalities is a public health menace of major proportions. Here in the United States alone, the total number of fatalities since the invention of the automobile will probably reach two million within the next five years.

The latest figures -- those for February of this year -- show that there was a 6-percent increase in fatalities over February of 1969. This past February alone cost us some 38-hundred American lives, and this is an incredibly intolerable situation.

Highway accidents are the leading cause of death among our young people, aged 16 to 25. Who is to say that some of these young people could not have been the great leaders of the next generation? Who is to say that a young man (or woman), whose life was snuffed out on the highway, might otherwise have lived on, in the cause of world peace?

My friends, surely the time is long past when we can afford to work on these common problems in isolation. All technology should enjoy free movement between the nations of the world, but particularly technology which can make the difference between life and death -- or crippling injury -- for so many millions in our respective nations.

By sharing what we learn, we advance the day when motorists and pedestrians everywhere will have the most complete protection that modern technology can provide.

This will be no easy task. It will demand the total cooperation of governments, manufacturers, academic researchers and professional engineering societies. It will require openness to new and radical ideas. It will take a commitment for the long-haul -- not just a casual interest or moral support.

If the enthusiastic response to this conference is any indication, we will provide that kind of world leadership. Perhaps this meeting will point the way toward ever wider NATO cooperation in a number of environmental matters of common concern to humanity. It is certainly only a first step. The challenging problems of implementation will come later, but I am sure you will rise to the challenge.

The immediate importance of this conference -- and it will be clear when your seminars end two days hence -- will be to demonstrate that passive restraints are systems whose time has come. I know they work. I've seen them work. And I know that we can't turn back now. There is too much at stake -- too many hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. Our motto should be "Get the bugs out of the bags" -- (or whatever devices work best) and get our citizens protected at the earliest possible moment.

Perhaps what pleases me most in this unique international effort is that it is sponsored by an agency of NATO -- an organization that came into being to defend all of us from alien attack, and now shows promise of evolving into a much wider sphere of action, with historic possibilities that are truly incalculable.

There is no better example of turning swords into plowshares. Let us hope that we can set an example for the rest of the world as well.

I wish you every success.

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