

U.S. Department of Transportation news



Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

STATEMENT PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT AT A NEWS CONFERENCE--55 MPH SPEED LIMIT--
WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 28, 1980

The Department's mid-year report that you have in your hands confirms that for the first time more than half of American motorists are complying with the 55-mile speed limit.

We're please with that figure--a 10 percent improvement over last year--because the report also shows that "55" continues to save lives and fuel.

As the chart shows, fatality rates have dropped and stayed lower on the Interstates since the 55-mile limit began. Over the same period the death rate on country roads not affected by the 55-mile limit has remained about the same.

And we're still saving energy. Lots of it. Tests by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory show that the average car suffers an eight percent loss in fuel economy between 40 and 50 miles an hour. An 11 1/2 percent loss from 50 to 60, and a 13 percent loss between 60 and 70.

That's an "average" car. But for the small car, the penalties are greater. As the chart shows, the loss in fuel economy is more severe for subcompact and compact cars than for larger cars. A Ford LTD, for example, pays about a 10 1/2 percent fuel economy penalty between 50 and 60. But there is a 13 percent loss for a subcompact Dodge Colt.

In other words, it is self-defeating to buy a small, economy car and then drive it at 60 or 65. Today's established speed limit, we are finding, is highly compatible with today's cars.

The report also verifies that as we move to smaller cars, driving 55 is more important that ever. In a collision between a subcompact and a full-size car, occupants of the smaller car are eight times more likely to be killed. Driving within the speed limit will not guarantee your survival in a crash situation, but lower speeds clearly reduce the risk and the severity of injuries.

Finally, the report shows that compliance with the law is growing and that the public--as a whole--favors "55". by a substantial margin.

Opinion polls have repeatedly shown support for "55," by margins ranging from 59 to 80 percent, and while American drivers traditionally have taken some leeway with posted speed limits, reports filed by the states--based on highway monitoring--show a national average speed of 55.8 mph for 1979.

In addition, a steadily growing number of professional, trade and citizen organizations throughout the country are endorsing the speed limit and pledging their members to abide by it.

I know there is some cynicism on this point, because we all get passed on the highway by other drivers exceeding the speed limit. But the statistics consistently show Americans favor "55" and most of them are driving "55."

I'm pleased that we have some guests here today. I'd like to introduce them and then ask Col. Thomas Smith, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police--whose organization has such an outstanding record of supporting "55," to make a brief comment. Then we'll open it to your questions.

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