



U.S. Department of  
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# News:

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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
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NEWS CONFERENCE ON AUTOMATIC CRASH PROTECTION  
JULY 11, 1984

The debate on this issue -- automatic crash protection for motorists -- has lasted 15 years. For the past eight months, since the passive restraint rulemaking process was resumed, I have spent many hours talking with representatives of all the parties involved. At the public hearing I conducted in Kansas City, I heard the heartbreaking testimony of victims and their families. Of all the special interests concerned, I can consider only one: the public interest.

The plan I am announcing today will save as many lives as possible, as soon as possible. It also looks to the future, encouraging the technology that could provide even greater safety in the years ahead.

I am requiring automatic occupant protection in all passenger cars based on a phased-in schedule beginning September 1, 1986. That schedule requires 10 percent of all cars manufactured for sale in the United States after September 1, 1986, to be equipped with automatic restraints. That requirement will extend to 25 percent of the cars built after September 1, 1987, and 40 percent of those produced after September 1, 1988.

One hundred percent of all automobiles manufactured for the U.S. market after September 1, 1989, will have automatic crash protection as required standard equipment.

The rule for 100 percent compliance is subject to only one condition. If states representing two-thirds of the U.S. population enact mandatory seat belt usage laws by April 1, 1989, the automatic crash protection requirement will be rescinded. If enough states do not take such action, the full fleet requirement will be in effect for all 1990 and subsequent model year cars built for U.S. sale.

Today's rule makes it clear we are not waiting until 1989 to make life-saving automatic crash protection available to America's motorists.

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Occupant restraint technologies have advanced over the last 10 years, and further breakthroughs will improve performance and comfort and reduce costs. At least one manufacturer is working toward the concept of energy-absorbing interiors, designed to minimize the impact of a crash. To encourage air bag installations or other new developments, we will credit a company with one-and-a-half cars for every one car complying with the standard by means other than automatic belts for the driver.

In addition to these steps, I am beginning an immediate \$40 million a year cooperative educational program to inform the public of benefits of seat belt use to encourage passage of seat belt laws. Half of this amount will be DOT-funded. The other half will be provided by the private sector, intensifying a program already under way.

In the last 10 years, 470,000 Americans have died on our highways. And sadly, most of the victims are young people -- young people whose lives could be saved.

We have all heard the numbers, but like many others, I have become keenly aware of the personal misery resulting from lives shattered and families devastated by the cruelty of auto crashes. Forty-three thousand deaths a year is a national tragedy, but for the severely injured -- the thousands of Americans who are disfigured or disabled -- the pain lingers on -- as do the costs. Auto accidents alone cost the American taxpayers almost \$2 billion a year in Federal public assistance programs.

Like most problems, highway deaths and injuries cannot be solved simply by the stroke of a pen or the wizardry of technology. We must use the best judgment, seek the best equipment and take full advantage of all the resources available to slash the highway death rate, reduce injuries and cut the costs to our families and our nation.

The rule I am signing today will do that. I ask everyone's support. It can be the greatest lifesaver we've ever known.

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