Talking Points

About Roadway Users

General facts regarding the driver:

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in the U.S. for people ages 6-33. They annually account for more than 1 million years of potential life lost before the age of 65.

- Each year more than 40,000 people are killed and more than 5 million are injured on U.S. highways.

- The cost of vehicle crashes in the United States is estimated to be $150 billion a year, or 2.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product.

- Vehicle crashes are a greater threat to life and health in the U.S. than crime is. In 1999, there was one murder every 34 minutes, but that year there was one fatality in a vehicle crash every 13 minutes. There was one violent crime every 22 seconds, but one vehicle-accident injury every 15 seconds.

Alcohol and Driving:

- Impaired driving is the most frequently committed violent crime in America. Every 33 minutes, someone in this country dies in an alcohol-related crash. About two out of every five Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives, and many will be innocent victims.

- Alcohol involvement is the single greatest factor in motor vehicle deaths and injuries.

- In addition to the death toll, about one million Americans are injured in alcohol-related crashes every year. Alcohol-related crashes cost society more than $45 billion a year – and just one alcohol-related fatality is estimated to cost society $950,000.

- At .08 blood-alcohol concentration, virtually ALL drivers are impaired with regard to critical driving tasks such as divided attention, complex reaction time, steering, lane-changing, and judgment. This impairment cuts across all age groups, sexes, and drinker types.

- Almost half of all youth (ages 15-20) traffic fatalities on weekends are alcohol-related, compared with 22 percent on weekdays.
Seat belts and child restraints:

- We all pay when people don’t buckle up -- the cost of inpatient hospital care for an unbelted car occupant involved in a crash averages $5,000 more than the cost of such care for a belted occupant. The general public bears 85 percent of such costs.

- Forty to fifty percent of children ages 4 to 8 in fatal crashes are totally unrestrained.

- Properly used booster seats – which let older children shorter than 4 foot 7 gain the fullest protection from standard back-seat seat belts designed for adults – substantially reduce the risk of injury in a crash.

Drowsy Driving:

- Each year, falling asleep while driving causes at least 100,000 auto crashes, 40,000 injuries and 1,550 fatalities.

- The largest group affected by drowsy driving is young men (ages 16-29), often “the brightest, most energetic, hard-working teens” whose crashes occur after midnight. The second-largest group is drivers over age 65, whose crashes tend to occur in early afternoon.

- Scientific studies show that consumption of even small amounts of alcohol intensifies pre-existing drowsiness.

- Sleep is the only real antidote to sleepiness. Scientific studies show that the common stopgap remedies of getting out of a car briefly and engaging in some exercise or cranking up the radio will not counter drowsy driving.

- Because young people are disproportionately represented in this category of fatalities, parents of teens and young adults should be urged to let visibly sleepy friends of their own children sleep over, much as one would urge a visibly drunk person to avoid the road until their condition improved.

Pedestrians:

- A pedestrian is injured in a traffic crash once every six minutes, and one is killed every 107 minutes.

- Most pedestrian accidents occur in cities, at night, away from intersections.

- 70 percent of pedestrian fatalities are males.

- In nearly half of pedestrian fatality crashes, alcohol is involved. Of those, in 31 percent of cases, it’s the pedestrian who is legally drunk.
**Bicyclists:**

- More than 46,000 bicyclists have died in traffic crashes in the United States since 1932 -- the first year that bicycle fatality estimates were recorded.

- In 1999, 750 bicyclists were killed, and approximately 51,000 were injured in traffic-related crashes. Children ages 14 and under accounted for 193 (26 percent) of the fatalities, making this one of the most frequent causes of injury-related death for young children.

- Each year almost 400,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.

- Universal bicycle helmet use by children ages 4 to 15 would prevent 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries, and 18,000 to 55,000 scalp and face injuries annually.

- Bicycle helmets are 85-88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries, making the use of helmets the single most effective way to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes.

- Despite the fact that 70 to 80 percent of all fatal bicycle crashes involve head injuries, only about 20-25 percent of all bicyclists wear bicycle helmets.

- Nationally, bicyclists ages 14 and under are at five times greater risk for injury than older cyclists.

**Vehicle Equipment, Design and Maintenance**

Advanced technological improvements and structural changes have made today's vehicles safer than ever. Equipment such as seat belts, child restraints and air bags all are proven ways to reduce crashes and save lives. Proper vehicle maintenance also helps save lives. Each of these aspects requires one important element - in order to be effective, individuals must make proper use of them.

Many manufacturers are designing vehicles with crash protection and safety features that exceed the minimum federal safety standards. Compare safety features and know how each works before you buy. For more information on vehicle safety ratings, go to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

Key questions to ask when looking to buy a vehicle are:

- How well will this vehicle protect people during a crash?

- What features does this vehicle have that help avoid a crash?
Does this vehicle have enough seat belts for all the passengers who will be riding in the vehicle?

Many features have impacted vehicle safety:

Air Bags

- Front and side air bags along with the seat belts are highly effective in reducing fatalities in moderate and high-speed frontal and side impact crashes.

- Air bags do not eliminate the need for seat belts and they are not designed to offer protection in rollovers, rear, or side impacts.

- Air bags have caused fatalities to unbelted occupants, occupants too close to the air bag when it deploys, and out-of-position children in low speed crashes.

- Redesigned air bags are less aggressive, but not less effective. Women and young children are now at less risk of serious injury.

- Air bag warning labels are important. They advise occupants to keep about 10 inches or more between the body and steering wheel and to never place a rear-facing infant seat in front of an air bag, even a reduced-power air bag.

Air Bag On-Off Switches

- The "On-off switch" is an additional consumer safety feature that can deactivate the driver or passenger air bags for occupants fitting certain risk profiles.

Seat Belts

- Research has found that lap/shoulder seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger car occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent.

- For light truck occupants, seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury by 60 percent and moderate-to-critical injury by 65 percent.

- Features such as adjustable upper belts; seat belt pretensioners; energy management features; integrated seat-belt systems and rear center seat lap/shoulder belts have improved seat belt performance.
Anti-lock Brake Systems

- These systems prevent a vehicle's wheels from locking during "panic" braking and allow the driver to maintain greater steering control. But drivers must operate them correctly by "stomping and steering" rather than pumping them.

Head Restraints

- These are extensions of the vehicle's seats that limit head movement during a rear impact, thus reducing the probability of neck injury.

Automatic-Dimming Rearview Mirrors

- These mirrors automatically darken to reduce headlight glare.

Vehicle Maintenance Plays an Important Role in Occupant Protection

- Vehicle maintenance is critical in maintaining optimum performance of any vehicle. Check the owner's manual and adhere to suggested scheduled maintenance.

Some general maintenance tips include:

- Check your tires for proper inflation pressure, tread wear and alignment;
- Winterize your vehicle in the fall if you live in a cold climate;
- Replace worn windshield wipers or any burned out lights;

If your vehicle does break down on the road, be prepared: always have an emergency kit containing at least the following items: a flashlight with extra batteries; warning devices such as flares or reflective triangles; jumper cables; and a first-aid kit. Also take along some bottled water for trips that involve traveling through isolated areas. This is especially important during the summer months and in hot climates.

Roadway Design, Signage and Road Improvements

Nearly 40,000 people are killed in highway crashes each year in the U.S., and nearly 2.5 million are injured. Highway crashes are the leading cause of death of people 3 through 6 and 8 through 34 years of age and are the cause of more permanent impairments than any other type of accident.

Studies show that increased investment in road and bridge improvements at the local level save lives. Making road lanes and shoulders wider, adding medians and improving bridges are just a
few of the improvements that have been shown to cut fatalities significantly. Highway safety information on this fact sheet is based on data obtained by The Road Information Program from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

- Every $100 million invested in highway safety improvements will result in approximately 145 fewer traffic fatalities over a 10-year period.

- Approximately 500 people are killed annually in crashes at rail-highway crossings.

- About 12,000 people are killed annually in traffic crashes involving collisions with a fixed object such as a tree, guardrail, utility pole, curb, or light or support pole.