



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Staff H-390B

Date: JUL - 1 1997

In reply refer to: H-97-8 and -9

To the International Association of Chiefs of Police,
the National Sheriffs' Association,
and members of the State Association of Chiefs of Police
(see attached mailing list)

In severe frontal crashes, air bags clearly increase the chances of survival, particularly for unbelted adult drivers. The protection afforded by air bags, however, does not extend equally to all passenger vehicle occupants. Between 1993 and 1996, 38 children died because they were struck by an air bag in what would have otherwise been a survivable crash, and 23 adults were also killed by their air bags in crashes they should have survived.¹ The increasing public concern about air bags and urgent questions regarding the effectiveness and the potential danger of these life-saving devices prompted the National Transportation Safety Board to convene a 4-day public forum in March 1997 to discuss concerns related to the role of air bags, to identify who is vulnerable to injuries, to examine the experience with air bags in other countries, and to address ways to increase seatbelt and child restraint use.² The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) participated in the forum, along with representatives from Australia, Canada and Europe, the automobile industry, air bag suppliers, insurance, safety, and consumer groups, and family members involved in crashes where air bags deployed.

Several points became evident during the forum. The "one-size-fits-all" approach to air bag design is obsolete: air bags need to be designed to protect all people in a variety of crash situations. With regard to passenger vehicles on the road today, children need to be in the back seat, and everyone needs to be buckled up and seated as far back as possible from the air bag. NHTSA needs to move quickly on a decision regarding air bag deactivation. NHTSA's databases of crash information preclude a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of air bags because the information is not comprehensive in one database and is insufficient in the other. Finally and perhaps most importantly, societal attitudes must change with regard to seatbelt use. The United States remains far behind other countries in seatbelt use, and the Nation pays a high price for it in terms of lives lost. Elected officials need to take responsibility for tough enforcement programs and to consider financial incentives (or penalties) if the Nation is to increase seatbelt use.

¹ National Transportation Safety Board. 1996. The performance and use of child restraint systems, seatbelts, and air bags for children in passenger vehicles. Safety Study NTSB/SS-96/01. Washington, D.C.

² National Transportation Safety Board. 1997. Proceedings of the National Transportation Safety Board forum on air bags and child passenger safety; March 17-20, 1997; Washington, D.C. Report of Proceedings NTSB/RP-97/01; PB97-917001.

The Safety Board's concerns about motor vehicle occupant protection have led it to examine and recommend action on a wide range of safety issues throughout its 30-year history. Important changes have already occurred, including improved designs of seatbelts and child restraint systems, the required installation of lap/shoulder belts at all outboard seating positions, the mandated use of child restraint systems in all 50 States and seatbelts in 49 States, an increase in public education about the importance of restraint use, and increased child restraint and seatbelt use rates. Additional improvements, however, are still needed.

About 40 percent of the children who are younger than 5 years and involved in fatal crashes are unrestrained, almost half of all children 5 to 9 years old and involved in fatal crashes are unrestrained, and about 40 percent of all front seat occupants involved in fatal crashes are unrestrained.³ Not only are these occupants at risk of being seriously injured or killed in a crash, but they are also, for the most part, violating the traffic laws.

According to NHTSA, lap/shoulder belts, when used properly, reduce the risk of fatal injury to front seat passenger vehicle occupants by 45 percent. Proper use of child restraint systems have been shown by NHTSA to be 71 percent effective in reducing the risk of death to infants in passenger vehicles and 54 percent effective for children between the ages of 1 and 4.⁴

Increasing the child restraint and seatbelt use rate is the most effective way of cutting the highway death toll. The Safety Board has previously recommended that the States enact strong legislation regarding child restraint and seatbelt use. In 1991, the Safety Board recommended that the 12 States without mandatory restraint use laws (MULs) enact legislation that would require occupants of all passenger cars, vans, and light trucks to use lap/shoulder belt systems in seating positions equipped with such belt systems. In 1995, the Board recommended that the States enact legislation that provides for primary enforcement of mandatory seatbelt use laws. Primary enforcement allows law enforcement officials to stop a vehicle solely for a seatbelt violation. Because of the importance of this issue, the Board placed this recommendation on its "Most Wanted" list of safety improvements.⁵ Today 49 States, the U.S. Territories, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have MULs.⁶

³ Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) maintained by the U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 1996. Revised estimates of child restraint effectiveness. Res. Note. Washington, D.C. December.

⁵ The purpose of the "Most Wanted" list, which is drawn up from safety recommendations previously issued, is to bring special emphasis to safety issues the Board deems most critical.

⁶ New Hampshire does not mandate seat use beyond age 12.

In general, seatbelt use rates in 1996 averaged about 15 percent higher in States with primary enforcement laws than in States with secondary enforcement laws. A 1987 evaluation by the University of North Carolina found that belt use increased as a function of enforcement level (i.e., citation rates per 100,000 population). For each enforcement level, belt use was 10 to 13 percent higher in States with primary enforcement laws than in States with secondary enforcement laws.⁷

According to NHTSA, increasing the seatbelt use rate from the present 68 percent to 85 percent would prevent an estimated 4,194 fatalities and 103,518 injuries annually. This reduction in injuries and deaths would result in an economic savings of about \$6.7 billion annually. A 90-percent use rate would prevent 5,536 fatalities and 132,670 injuries and would save \$8.8 billion annually. Seatbelts and child restraints are the most effective means of reducing fatalities and serious injuries when traffic crashes occur; they are estimated to save 9,500 lives in the United States each year.

North Carolina has demonstrated that a primary enforcement seatbelt law in combination with a dedicated and visible seatbelt traffic enforcement program increases restraint use and saves lives; the State reported a reduction of 100 fatalities in the first year following its "Click It or Ticket" occupant restraint enforcement campaign. The Safety Board is aware of several other seatbelt enforcement programs in addition to the one in North Carolina.

Seatbelt enforcement programs, however, may not be a priority for many law enforcement organizations that are responsible for traffic safety. An active seatbelt enforcement program combined with a primary seatbelt law has more potential for reducing highway deaths and injuries than most other traffic enforcement programs. Additionally, active seatbelt enforcement programs have proven an excellent opportunity to identify other violators, such as fugitives. Furthermore, the Safety Board recognizes the impact law enforcement officers have in encouraging States and legislators to enact certain laws. The Board believes that if the law enforcement community actively supported passage of primary seatbelt laws, States would be more likely to enact the laws needed to reduce highway deaths and injuries.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the State Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Sheriffs' Association:

Actively support efforts to adopt primary enforcement of seatbelt laws in States that do not have such legislation. (H-97-8)

Conduct dedicated and highly visible occupant restraint enforcement programs that focus on increasing the use of seatbelts and child restraints. (H-97-9)

⁷ Campbell, B.J.; Stewart, J.R.; Campbell, F.A. 1987. 1985-1986 experience with belt laws in the United States. Raleigh, NC: Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "...to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations H-97-8 and -9 in your reply.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in these recommendations.

By:  Hall
Jim Hall
Chairman

**Law Enforcement Organizations and
Members of the State Association of Chiefs of Police**

Mr. Darrell Sanders
President
International Association of Chiefs of Police
515 North Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2357

Chief Joseph G. Estey
Hartford Police Department
66 V. A. Cutoff Road
White River Junction, Vermont 05001

Chief Glenn Holt (Retired)
Post Office Box 341
Brewton, Alabama 36427

Ms. Judy King, Interim Executive Director
Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police
URAL Criminal Justice Institute (CJI)
2801 South University
Little Rock, Arkansas 72204-1099

Chief William P. Nolan
North Little Rock Police Department
200 West Pershing Boulevard
North Little Rock, Arkansas 72114-2294

Chief Ted Mertens
Manhattan Beach Police Department
420 15th Street
Manhattan Beach, California 90266-4607

Mr. William Kirkby
Connecticut Police Chiefs Association
638 Prospect Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06105

Mr. Martin W. Johnson III
Delaware Police Chiefs Council
400 South Queen Street
Dover Delaware 19901

Mr. Aldine Moser, Jr., Executive Director
National Sheriffs' Association
1450 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3490

Director Jan Deveny
Department of Public Safety
9611 South East 36th Street
Mercer Island, Washington 98040
National Sheriff's Association

Mr. Harold M. Robbins
Executive Director
Florida Association of Chiefs of Police
Post Office Box 14038
Tallahassee, Florida 32317-4038

Mr. Les Taylor
Arizona Association of Chiefs
1320 West Elliot Road, Suite 103-485
Tempe, Arizona 85284

Chief Wayne Cone
Harrison Police Department
Post Office Box 1715
Harrison, Arizona 72601

Mr. Ross D. Hutchings, Executive Director
California Police Chiefs Association
CPCA Headquarters
1455 Response Road, Suite 190
Sacramento, California 95815

Mr. Jack VanArsdol, Executive Director
CO Association of Chiefs of Police
2701 Alcott Street, #386
Denver, Colorado 80211

Chief William Hogan
Newark Police Department
Post Office Box 390
Newark, Delaware 19715-0390

Chief William B. Berger
North Miami Beach Police Department
16901 Northeast 19th Street
North Miami Beach, Florida 33162

Chief Richard Beary
Lake Mary Police Department
236 Rinehart Road
Lake Mary, Florida 32746

Chief Fred Hayes
Gainesville Police Department
118 Jesse Jewell Parkway
Gainesville, Georgia 30501

Chief William R. Kicklighter
Dougherty County Police Department
2106 Habersham Road
Albany, Georgia 31701-3906

Chief William Gordon
Meridian Police Department
201 East Idaho
Meridian, Idaho 83642

Chief Gary J. Schira
Bloomington Police Department
201 South Bloomington Road
Bloomington, Illinois 60108-1403

Chief John Mulvey
Indiana University Police Department
430 University Boulevard
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202

Chief Stephan Niebur
Osceola Police Department
100 South Fillmore
Osceola, Iowa 50213

Assistant Chief Doyle King (Retired)
Post Office Box 780603
Wichita, Kansas 67278-0603

Colonel E. Douglas Hamilton
Chief of Police
Louisville Division of Police
633 West Jefferson Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Mr. Frank V. Rotondo
Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police
2821 Warm Springs Road, Suite A1
Columbus, Georgia 31904

Chief Michael S. Nakamura
Honolulu Police Department
801 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813-2920

Mr. George F. Koertge, CAE
Executive Director
Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police
520 East Allen Street
Springfield, Illinois 62703

Mr. Michael Ward, CAE
Executive Director
Indiana Association of Chiefs of Police
3905 Vincennes Road, Suite 304
Indianapolis, Indiana 46268

Chief Stanley Rowe
Burlington Police Department
424 North Third
Burlington, Iowa 52601

Chief Ronald Jackson
Newton Police Department
Post Office Box 426
Newton, Kansas 67114

Chief Tom Hayseldon
Shawnee Police Department
6535 Quivira Road
Shawnee, Kansas 66216

Dr. Larry Gaines
 Eastern Kentucky University
 920 West Main Street
 Richmond, Kentucky 40475

Chief Ron McBride
 Ashland Police Department
 Post Office Box 1864
 Ashland, Kentucky 41105-1864

Mr. Norman C. Ferachi
 Executive Director
 Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police
 603 Europe Street
 Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Mr. Charles Jackson
 Maine Chiefs of Police Association
 93 Silver Street
 Waterville, Maine 04901

Mr. Morris Lewis
 Maryland Chiefs of Police Association
 Post Office Box 4686
 Largo, Maryland 20775

Chief Paul L. Doherty
 Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association
 130 Bowdoin Street, Room 610
 Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Mr. Thomas A. Hendrickson
 Executive Director
 Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police
 2133 University Park Drive, #200
 Okemos, Michigan 48864-3975

Mr. Lloyd Rivers
 Executive Director
 Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association
 1220 South Concord
 South Saint Paul, Minnesota 55075

Chief R. D. Vanlandingham
 Batesville Police Department
 106 College Street
 Batesville, Mississippi 38606

Chief John Ritchie
 Alexandria Police Department
 Post Office Box 1906
 Alexandria, Louisiana 71309-1906

Chief Nick Congemi
 Kenner Police Department
 1801 Williams Boulevard
 Kenner, Louisiana 70062

Chief Robert M. Zidek
 Bladensburg Police Department
 4910 Tilden Road
 Bladensburg, Maryland 20710

Chief Richard M. Stanley
 Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association
 130 Bowdoin Street, Room 610
 Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Chief Peter L. Carnes
 Yarmouth Police Department
 424 Main Street
 Yarmouth, Massachusetts 01984

Chief Ronald F. Deziel
 Dearborn Police Department
 16099 Michigan Avenue
 Dearborn, Michigan 48126

Chief Robert Johnson
 Jackson Police Department
 Post Office Box 17
 Jackson, Mississippi 39205-0017

Mr. Dennis Weiser
 Executive Director
 Missouri Police Chiefs Associations
 600 East Capitol Street
 Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Chief Neil F. Kurlander
 Maryland Heights Police Department
 212 Milwell Drive
 Maryland Heights, Missouri 59558

Chief James Toth
 West Yellowstone Police Department
 Post Office 579
 West Yellowstone, Montana 59558

Chief S. E. Ford
 South Sioux City Police Department
 701 West 29th Street
 South Sioux City, Nebraska 68776

Chief John D. Coyle
 North Attleboro Police Department
 16 Mason Avenue
 North Attleboro, Massachusetts 02761

Chief John K. Stimson
 Newington Police Department
 71 Fox Point Road
 Newington, New Hampshire 03801

Chief Stanley Stevens
 Wolfeboro Police Department
 Post Office Box 1689
 Wolfeboro, New Hampshire 03894

Ms. Lorraine Kulick
 Executive Director
 New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police
 777 Alexander Road, Suite 203
 Princeton, New Jersey 08540

Chief Richard Melton
 Farmington Police Department
 800 Municipal Drive
 Farmington, New Mexico 87401

Chief James R. DeLapp
 DeWitt Police Department
 Post Office Box 159
 DeWitt, New York 13214-0159

Chief Jack Conner
 Spindale Police Department
 Post Office Box 186
 Spindale, North Carolina 28160

Chief Donald Wentz
 Williston Police Department
 P. O. Box 1083
 Williston, North Dakota 58802

Chief William Catlin
 Lordstown Police Department
 1583 Salt Springs, Southwest
 Lordstown, Ohio 44481

Chief Ray Overton
 Oklahoma Association of Chiefs of Police
 200 Northwest 66th Street, Suite 965
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73116

Chief John Courtney
 LeGrande Police Department
 1109 K Avenue
 LeGrande, Oregon 97850

Mr. Ronald Smeal, Executive Director
 Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association
 2941 North Front Street
 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17110

Chief John O'Donnell
 Narragansett Police Department
 40 Caswell Street
 Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882

Commissioner Mark Whitman
 Troy Police Department
 55 State Street
 Troy, New York 12180

Chief Tom Moss
 Garner Police Department
 Post Office Box 446
 Garner, North Carolina 27529

Chief Kathy Berg
 Hazen Police Department
 201 West Main Street, Box 717
 Hazen, North Dakota 58545

Mr Todd N. Wurschmidt, Ph D
 Executive Director
 Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police, Inc
 6277 Riverside Drive, #2N
 Dublin, Ohio 43017-5067

Chief Steve Williams
 Tuttle Police Department
 Post Office Box 10
 Tuttle, Oklahoma 73089-0010

Mr. Larry Campbell
 Executive Director
 Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police
 727 Center Street, Suite 300
 Salem, Oregon 97301

Chief Frank Brown
 Mount Lebanon Police Department
 710 Washington Road
 Mount Lebanon, Pennsylvania 15228

Chief Vincent Vespia, Jr.
 South Kingston Police Department
 Post Office Box 10
 Wakefield, Rhode Island 02880

Chief Thomas Tighe
 Jamestown Police Department
 Conanicus Avenue
 Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835

Mr. Carl B. Stokes, Director
 Law Enforcement and Safety
 University of South Carolina
 Columbia, South Carolina 29208

Ms. Yvonne Vik
 Executive Director
 South Dakota Chief's Association
 214 East Capital
 Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Mr Robert Smith
 Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police
 Post Office Box 498
 Chapel Hill, Tennessee 37034

Chief Barbara J. Childress
 Richland Hills Police Department
 6700 Baker Boulevard
 Richland Hills, Texas 76118

Chief Thomas N. Shehan
 Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Police
 Post Office Drawer 610687
 Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, Texas 75261

Mr. Wayne D. Shepard
 Executive Director
 Utah Association of Chiefs of Police
 3135 South 3600 West
 West Valley, Utah 84119

Chief Gary Watson
 Norwich Police Department
 Post Office Box 311
 Norwich, Vermont 05055

Chief James Wynne
 North Kingston Police Department
 8166 Post Road
 North Kingstown, Rhode Island 02852

Chief James Bush
 Sturgis Police Department
 1147 Sherman Street
 Sturgis, South Dakota 57785

Chief Eddie Boatwright
 Germantown Police Department
 1930 South Germantown Road
 Germantown, Tennessee 38138

Chief Ronald Street
 Johnson City Police Department
 601 East Main Street
 Johnson City, Tennessee 37605

Mr Loyd Mathews
 Executive Director
 Texas Police Chiefs Association
 Post Office Box 1550
 Paris, Texas 75460

Chief B. Wayne Hoaldrige
 Riverdale Police Department
 4580 South Weber River Drive
 Riverdale, Utah 84405

Chief Doyle Talbot
 Layton Police Department
 429 North Wasatch Drive
 Layton, Utah 84041

Chief Douglas Hoyt
 Montpelier Police Department
 39 Main Street
 Montpelier, Vermont 05602

Ms. Dana Schrad, Executive Director
 Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police
 8003 Franklin Farms Drive, Suite 111
 Richmond, Virginia 23288

Chief Chuck Wall
 Virginia Beach Police Department
 Municipal Center
 Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456-9099

Chief Al Wallis
 Renton Police Department
 200 Mill Avenue, South
 Renton, Washington 98055-2132

Chief Lockheed D. Reader
 Puyallup Police Department
 311 West Pioneer
 Puyallup, Washington 98371

Chief Edward Long
 Wheeling Police Department
 1500 Chapline Street
 Wheeling, West Virginia 26003

Chief William S. Brandimore
 Wausau Police Department
 610 Fifth Street
 Wausau, Wisconsin 54401

Chief Edward A. Rudolph, Jr.
 Port Washington Police Department
 100 West Grand Avenue
 Port Washington, Wisconsin 53074

Mr Byron Rookstool, Executive Director
 Wyoming Sheriffs and
 Police Chiefs Association
 8817 Sherman Mountain Road
 Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009

Chief James Powers
 Fredericksburg Police Department
 Post Office Box 604
 Fredericksburg, Virginia 22404-0604

Chief Randy Hamilton
 Chehalis Police Department
 Post Office Box 516
 Chehalis, Washington 98532

Mr. Larry Erikson
 Executive Director
 Washington Association of Sheriffs
 and Police Chiefs
 Post Office Box 826
 Olympia, Washington 98507

Chief Carl Kocher
New Martinsburg Police Department
193 Main Street
New Martinsburg, West Virginia 26155

Chief Wayne Cleveland
Martinsburg Police Department
232 North Queen Street
Martinsburg, West Virginia 25401

Chief Donald L. Thaves
Executive Secretary
Wisconsin Chiefs of Police, Inc.
116 Humphrey Circle, South
Shawano, Wisconsin 54166

Chief Michael Lien
Two Rivers Police Department
1717 West Park Street
Two Rivers, Wisconsin 54241

Chief William S. Tynan, Jr.
University of Wyoming
Post Office Box 3124
Laramie, Wyoming 82071