

**Remarks of
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at the
COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SAFETY ALLIANCE
ROADCHECK 2005 NEWS CONFERENCE
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Introduction

On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, I want to thank you for the inviting me to be here with you. I'm excited to be here today for this important safety event.

Safety Goals and Accomplishments

Safety is at the very HEART of what we do at the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The Secretary and the President constantly remind us all that safety needs to be our focus. I see all these uniforms in the crowd and I'm reminded that I'm speaking to the choir.

Still, 42,800 people died on the nation's highways in 2004, up slightly from 2003, according to preliminary projections.

And nearly 5,000 of those deaths involved commercial motor vehicles (CMVs). We know that it's particularly challenging for motor carriers to bring down the fatality rate, because the truck miles traveled are increasing faster than other vehicle miles.

Importance of Inspections

This is the 18th year that USDOT has partnered with CVSA to focus on the year-round commercial vehicle and driver roadside inspection program. Roadcheck draws public attention to the continuous efforts of law enforcement and the truck and bus industries to save lives on North American highways.

People who drive by here may see this as simply a weigh station, but it's much more than that. The many inspections that occur here are critical for maintaining safety.

Our agency estimates that from 1998 to 2003, roadside inspections and enforcement activities nationwide saved nearly 3,800 lives, prevented more than 62,000 injuries, and stopped close to 85,000 crashes.

Driver Issues and Crash Causation Study

FMCSA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducted an intensive study recently to identify the causes of, or factors contributing to, large truck crashes.

The Large Truck Crash Causation Study carefully examined a nationally representative sample of about 1,000 serious and fatal truck crashes that occurred from April 2001 through December 2003.

The chart here to my left shows one of the early findings. The thing that was so surprising – what jumped out at us – is the impact that the driver has on the crash event. It's probably intuitive to the law enforcement officers here that driver issues are important.

But just HOW very important they are is something that the study is showing. The study will be released in August, with more data to follow.

The preliminary findings of the study reveal that driver factors were up to 10 TIMES more prevalent than vehicle or environmental factors in events that led up to crashes involving one truck and one passenger vehicle.

This means that factors such as driver condition, decisions, performance, and familiarity with the roadway and the truck were significantly more prevalent than vehicle problems such as faulty brakes, or environmental conditions such as bad road signs or poor weather. We're not talking about causes of crashes, but factors involved.

But the message is clear. Drivers are the most important element in maintaining safety. So inspectors will be checking hours of service records, licenses and medical certificates, and evidence of drug and alcohol use and more, as they do their Level 1 safety checks. These checks can have a direct and immediate impact on safety.

National Tank Check Project

In addition to checking the VEHICLES transporting materials and the DRIVERS who operate those vehicles, we pay attention to the cargo itself.

One of the reasons we have the tank truck here is for the tank check demonstration: An important part of the Roadcheck is the special emphasis on the secure transportation of Hazardous Materials. Our National Cargo Tank Check is conducted each year as part of the Roadcheck event and we appreciate the support of our partners in making this effort a success.

The goal of Tank Check is to reduce the risk of HM incidents – spills – by identifying cargo tanks transporting HM that are not in compliance with the Hazardous Materials Regulations. FMCSA encourages all of its partners to join in this effort. We're working closely with hazmat carriers to ensure their drivers are aware of the special risks of operating tank trucks.

Safety Belt Usage

Roadcheck is about safe drivers, safe vehicles, and safe loads. The Bush Administration is proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 80 percent — the highest level ever. This is estimated to save more than 15,000 lives and prevent \$50 billion in economic costs every year.

However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up. So FMCSA is asking CMV drivers to buckle up. It's important that they come home safe every trip, every time.

Close

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. And thank you to the Maryland State Police and the Maryland Department of Transportation for their work here today.