

November 2004

## Seventh Report to Congress, Fifth Report to the President *The National Initiative for Increasing Safety Belt Use*

Prepared by the U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

This report is submitted in response to Executive Order 13043 and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees' request to the Secretary of Transportation and the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to keep the President and the Committees apprised of the activities of the national *Buckle Up America* campaign. This report highlights the activities of the campaign from January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2003.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE *Buckle Up America* CAMPAIGN**

#### **National Safety Belt Use Goal**

- To increase the national safety belt use rate to 78 percent by the end of 2003.

#### **Four-Point Plan**

- Enact strong legislation.
- Maintain active, high-visibility law enforcement.
- Build public-private partnerships.
- Conduct well-coordinated, effective public education.

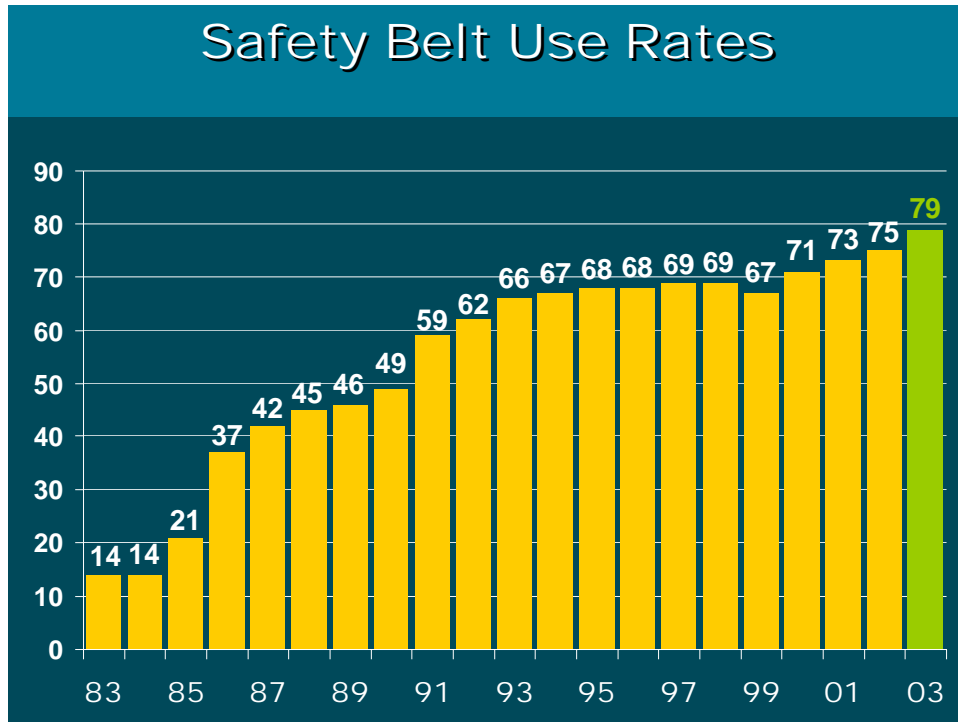
### **I. DRAMATIC GAINS ACHIEVED IN SAFETY BELT USE AND LIVES SAVED IN 2003**

As in past years, the *Buckle Up America* (BUA) Campaign in 2003 continued to make strides in increasing safety belt and child safety seat use. The national safety belt use rate rose to 79 percent in 2003, 4 percentage points higher than in 2002 – the highest level ever recorded. Significantly, approximately 17 percent of safety belt nonusers were converted to users, twice the rate seen in previous years.

Safety belts are approximately 50 percent effective in preventing fatalities in crashes in which motorists would otherwise die, so raising safety belt use saves lives. NHTSA estimates that safety belt use prevented 14,903 deaths in 2003. Safety belt use prevents untold tragedy to American families and saves billions of dollars in medical and lost productivity costs annually. If all

passenger vehicle occupants over age 4 wore safety belts, NHTSA estimates that 20,984 lives (that is, an additional 6,081 lives) could have been saved in 2003.

NHTSA estimates that for each percentage point increase in safety belt use, an additional 1.8 million people are buckled up, and 270 lives are saved. Thus, NHTSA estimates that, in 2003, the 4-percentage point increase resulted in an additional 7.2 million people buckling up than in 2002 and 1,080 additional lives were saved. NHTSA estimates that the increased use of safety belts in 2003 saved the Nation \$3.3 billion in crash-related costs.



These gains were attributable in large measure to the 2003 *Click It or Ticket* high visibility safety belt law enforcement campaign conducted by NHTSA, State highway safety offices and other public and private sector partners between May 19 and June 1, 2003 (see Section II, below).

According to the annual assessment on fatalities in 2003 from NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), the Nation experienced a historic drop in the crash fatality rate in 2003, due in part to the increased number of people riding buckled up. Indeed, in 2003, the number of persons killed and injured in motor vehicle crashes -- both occupants and non-occupants -- dropped about 1 percent from 2002, and the fatality rate fell to 1.48 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) -- the biggest decline since 1999.

Passenger vehicle occupant fatalities dropped to 31,904 -- a reduction of 939 -- the largest reduction both in terms of number and percentage since 1992. The percentage of unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes declined by 3 percentage points, closely reflecting the 4-percentage point increase in safety belt use observed in 2003. Declining fatalities in passenger vehicles are consistent with increases in safety belt use and more crashworthy vehicles.

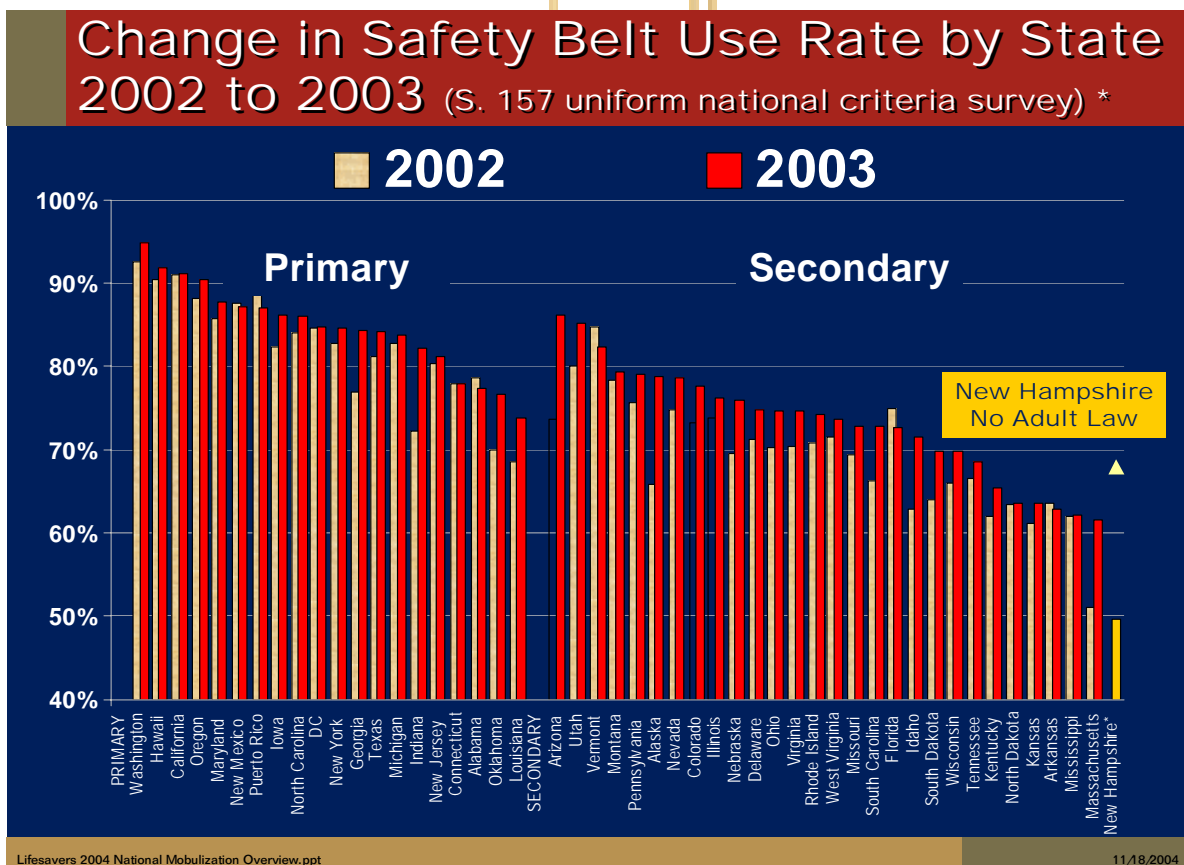
While unbelted fatalities declined in 2003, 56 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles were still not wearing safety belts. This underscores the need for States to adopt and enforce primary safety belt laws, like those enacted in 2003 by Illinois and Delaware.

### Usage Remains Higher in States With Primary Safety Belt Laws

Primary safety belt enforcement laws allow officers to stop and ticket a motorist simply for not wearing a safety belt, whereas secondary safety belt laws allow officers to stop and ticket a motorist for not wearing a safety belt only if the motorist commits another infraction.

By the end of 2003 -- following the enactment of primary enforcement provisions in Illinois and Delaware -- there were 20 primary law States, 29 secondary law States, and one State that has no adult safety belt use law. (In New Hampshire, it is legal for motorists over 18 to ride unbelted). The District of Columbia and Puerto Rico also have primary laws.

NHTSA's National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) has consistently found higher use rates in the presence of primary laws, with statistically different rates of 83 percent in primary law States compared to 75 percent in secondary law States in 2003.



\* Section 157 Safety Belt Grants

## **Where Did Safety Belt Use Increase?**

In addition to increasing nationwide, safety belt use was statistically higher in 2003 than in 2002 in the following areas:

- In the Southern region of the U.S.
- In urban and suburban areas.
- Among males in two distinct age groups: 16-24 and 25-69 (note: the advertising component of the 2003 campaign sought to reach males ranging between young adults and adults. Use also increased among females in the same age ranges).
- In States governed by secondary safety belt laws.
- In all types of vehicles (passenger cars, vans, sport utility vehicles, and pickup trucks).
- Among both drivers and (right front) passengers.
- During both weekdays and weekends.
- During both weekday rush hour and weekday non-rush hour periods.

Safety belt use increased in urban areas from 72 percent in 2002 to 79 percent in 2003, and in suburban areas from 76 percent to 81 percent. One quarter of non-users in urban areas were converted to users. Use in rural areas remained statistically unchanged at 74 percent in 2003.

## **Where Does Safety Belt Use Remain Low?**

In spite of the steady gains achieved in recent years, a number of challenges remain. For example, use remains lower in secondary law States, and is lower among pickup truck drivers and occupants than those in passenger cars, vans, and sport utility vehicles. In 2003, safety belt use was lowest in the Northeast (particularly in New England), followed by the Midwest, South, and West.

## **II. *Click It or Ticket* CAMPAIGN YIELDS GREAT DIVIDENDS**

Nearly every State uses Selective Traffic Enforcement Programs (STEPs) to improve the safety belt use rate. STEP programs are intense, limited duration programs combining publicity, warnings, and aggressive enforcement to achieve important traffic safety goals in a limited timeframe. Most States conduct at least two STEP waves per year and schedule at least one of these events to occur simultaneously with the national mobilizations. In 2003, mobilizations occurred in May and November.

National law enforcement mobilizations are conducted each year by NHTSA and the Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign of the National Safety Council, in conjunction with State Highway Safety Offices and over 12,000 State and local law enforcement agencies. Because a large number of States and the District of Columbia currently use the *Click It or Ticket* slogan (35 States in 2003), national mobilizations are often referred to as *Click It or Ticket* Campaigns.

Thanks to substantial funds provided by Congress for paid advertising in support of the 2003 *Click It or Ticket* Campaign, numerous efforts were undertaken to reach 18-34 year-old males. NHTSA was particularly interested in determining whether safety belt use increased among young males, since this group is at high crash risk and typically exhibits comparatively lower rates of use.

Consequently, NOPUS, which had generally collected demographic data in even-numbered years, was supplemented to collect age and gender data in 2003.

Nearly \$25 million in targeted State and national advertising was budgeted for placing television, radio and print advertisements focusing on 18-34 year-old males. The ads were placed on television and radio shows preferred by that group. Individual States spent \$16 million of Section 157 Safety Belt Innovative grant funding from the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) on messages expressing intolerance of non-use of safety belts.

In addition, the Federal Government received a special appropriation of \$8 million for a national media buy carried out by NHTSA. The national advertisement specifically carried a message that coast-to-coast the law enforcement community was serious about enforcing the safety belt law.

The NOPUS findings indicate that the advertising/enforcement campaign was a success. Safety belt use rose among 16-24 year-old males from 65 percent in 2002 to 72 percent in 2003, and among 25-69 year-old males from 73 percent to 78 percent. Use also rose among males overall, from 72 percent in 2002 to 77 percent in 2003. While we cannot specifically attribute these increases to the enforcement campaigns, some combination of these, or other factors, we are confident that the *Click It or Ticket* Campaign is, to a large extent, responsible for these improvements.

A special evaluation was done of the May 2003 mobilization. This mobilization included the largest-ever nationwide publicity and enforcement program to increase safety belt use. Similar to previous mobilizations, the May 2003 mobilization included a 2-week enforcement blitz, running from May 19 through the Memorial Day holiday and ending on June 1. A key difference with this mobilization was that it included an unprecedented level of paid advertisements.

Law enforcement officers across the Nation issued more than 500,000 safety belt citations during the May 2003 two-week enforcement phase. Safety belt use increased in 40 States and the District of Columbia.

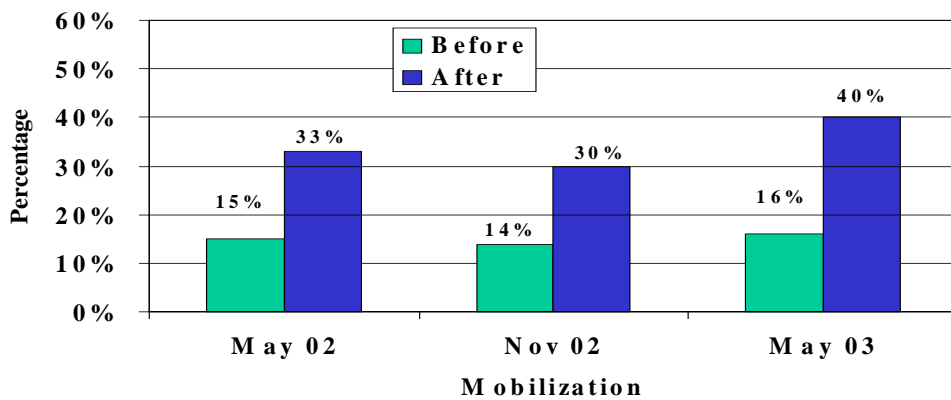
### **Pre/Post Telephone Survey Results**

The May 2003 campaign also included a national pre- and post-enforcement wave telephone survey, which included a total of 2,446 respondents (1,201 respondents pre-wave, 1,245 post-wave). Results indicated that respondents became more aware of safety belt enforcement efforts and perceived an increase in enforcement activity toward safety belt use. Two measures of perceived enforcement indicated an increase in the proportion of motorists believing that “police in their communities were writing more tickets now than before” and “a ticket for non-use was more likely now than before.”

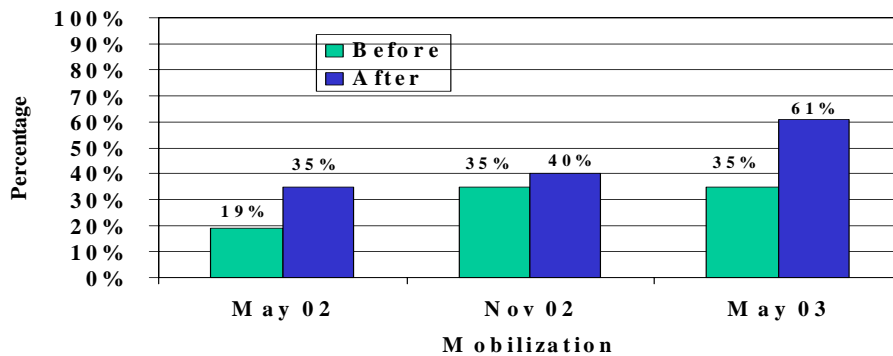
Pre-wave surveys indicated that respondents mostly received messages concerning safety belts and safety belt enforcement via television and radio. Post-wave surveys indicated that increased exposure on both television and radio resulted in an increase in the number of people aware of the *Click It or Ticket* message during the May 2003 mobilization.

Comparisons with two previous national telephone surveys (May 2002 and November 2002) indicated increases in awareness of national mobilizations and *Click It or Ticket* in particular. Results from driver surveys indicated that there was a high awareness of media messages and that the “Click It or Ticket” slogan, in particular, gained much attention. Support for stronger safety belt laws has remained strong over the course of several national mobilizations.

### Percent Who Had Heard or Seen Special Enforcement Efforts in the Past 30 Days



### Percent Who Had Heard or Seen Click It or Ticket Message in the Past 30 Days



## **Impressive Gains Made in Occupant Protection Legislation**

In 2003, primary safety belt provisions were enacted in Illinois and Delaware, bringing the number of States with such laws in effect to 20 (see Attachment 1). Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia also have primary laws in effect.

In addition, many States took action in 2003 to strengthen their child restraint laws by closing loopholes and otherwise upgrading their laws. In recognition that more needs to be done to provide full protection to children who have outgrown their forward-facing child safety seats (at about age 4), many States have enacted requirements that child passengers be restrained in a booster seat until they are able to ride safely in an adult safety belt. While none of these laws are considered optimal, they provide coverage for children up to as high as age 8, a major step forward from previous requirements. Eight States passed such requirements in 2003 (see Attachment 1).

As of December 2003, 22 States and the District of Columbia had enacted provisions mandating booster seat use (see Attachment 1 for a list of the States that enacted such protections in 2003).

### **III. PROGRESS MADE IN CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY, BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN**

Restraint use by young children reached record levels in 2002, and those gains were sustained in 2003. NOPUS in 2002 showed that 99 percent of infants (children under age 1) and 94 percent of toddlers (ages 1-3) were restrained, but only 83 percent of children ages 4 through 7 were restrained.

The 2003 FARS findings determined that the overall number of fatalities among children from birth through age 3 remained at historic low levels, and declined among children ages 4 through 7. This continued decrease in the number of child occupant deaths is in large part due to the significant increase in child restraint use since the *Buckle Up America* Campaign began. In 1996, just before the campaign began, restraint use among infants was 85 percent and only about 60 percent of toddlers were restrained while riding in vehicles.

Older child passengers did not fare as well in 2003. Although overall crash-related fatalities among children ages 4 through 7 decreased in 2003, fatalities among child passengers in this age group increased by 5.1 percent. In addition, the number of fatalities among children ages 8 through 15 increased to more than 1,600.

To combat this trend among booster-aged children (ages 4 through 7), in 2003 NHTSA initiated and expanded a wide variety of programs and initiatives. These included accelerated research, upgraded crash testing protocols, development of a new anthropomorphic crash test dummy to approximate the size of a booster-aged child, creation of a new public service advertising campaign in cooperation with the Advertising Council, and implementation of a community demonstration program led by the Think First National Injury Prevention Foundation. Similar efforts addressing children ages 8 through 15 are also being planned.

#### **IV. FUNDS SUPPORTING THE *BUCKLE UP AMERICA* CAMPAIGN**

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) (Public Law 105-178) was signed into law on June 9, 1998. In addition to providing funding for improving America's roadways, bridges, and transit systems, this comprehensive legislation provided funding for increasing safety belt and child safety seat use.

**23 USC SECTION 402:** TEA-21 provided funds to States and communities under Section 402 to reduce traffic crashes and resulting deaths, injuries, and property damage. A State could use these grant funds only for highway safety purposes; at least 40 percent of these funds had to be used to address local traffic safety problems, including restraint use.

**23 USC SECTION 405:** TEA-21 created a new incentive grant program under Section 405 to increase the use of safety belts and child safety seats by encouraging States to adopt more effective laws, stronger penalties, and highly visible enforcement and education programs. To qualify for a Section 405 occupant protection incentive grant, States demonstrated their eligibility under special criteria.

**23 USC SECTION 157:** TEA-21 created a program under Section 157 to encourage States to increase their safety belt use rates in recognition that increased safety belt use decreases crash injuries and the financial burden these preventable injuries place on Federal programs. Funds were allocated to eligible States based on estimated savings in medical costs to the Federal Government due to improved safety belt use.

The Act also provided that Section 157 funds not allocated in incentive grants in a fiscal year be allocated to the States to carry out innovative projects to promote increased safety belt use rates. NHTSA established criteria for the selection of State plans to receive allocations, ensuring, to the maximum extent practicable, demographic and geographic diversity and a diversity of safety belt use rates among the States selected for allocations. Subject to the availability of funds, TEA-21 provided for a \$100,000 minimum grant amount for each State plan.

**SECTION 2003(b):** Section 2003(b) of TEA-21 authorized funds to implement a new child passenger protection program designed to prevent deaths and injuries to children, educate the public concerning the proper installation of child restraints, and train child passenger safety personnel concerning child restraint use. A State could use these grant funds only to carry out child passenger protection education and training programs. Funds allocated to the States under these programs in FY 2003 can be found in Attachment 2.

#### **V. FUTURE PLANS AND ACTIVITIES**

NHTSA is fully committed to reducing the number of deaths and injuries on America's roadways. The *Buckle Up America* Campaign has played an extremely important role in fulfilling this commitment to our Nation.

NHTSA will continue to build and maintain partnerships, support law enforcement officials, deliver effective public education, and devise new technologies to promote occupant protection.



NHTSA will also maintain its commitment to provide technical support to States in their efforts to enact strong laws that help to protect all Americans as they travel in motor vehicles. Given the steadily increasing rates of safety belt use seen in 2003, NHTSA will continue to implement and refine the *Click It Or Ticket* Campaign nationwide to achieve further increases in use in 2004.

At the same time, special programs will be conducted in 2004 emphasizing higher-risk groups that have not been as responsive to enforcement-focused activities. Some of these groups include:

- Drivers and occupants of pickup trucks
- Minorities
- Rural residents
- Youth
- Part-time safety belt users
- Older Americans

## VI. REFERENCES

Glassbrenner, D. *Safety Belt Use in 2003*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Technical Report, DOT HS 809 646, September 2003.

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Glassbrenner, D. *Safety Belt Use in 2003 – Use Rates in the States and Territories*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 713, March 2004.

*National Occupant Protection Use Survey – 1996, Controlled Intersection Study*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, August 1997.

*Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality Counts and Injury Estimates for 2003*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 755, August 2004.

Solomon, M., Chaudhary, N. and Cosgrove, L. *May 2003 Click It or Ticket Safety Belt Mobilization Evaluation*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Technical Report, DOT HS 809 694, March 2004.

*Traffic Safety Facts 2003, Occupant Protection*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 765.

*Traffic Safety Facts 2003, Overview*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 767.

## ATTACHMENT 1

### 2003 LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

<b>STATES THAT PASSED PRIMARY SAFETY BELT LAW PROVISION IN 2003</b>	<b>DATE OF ENACTMENT</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b>
DELAWARE	6/30/03	6/30/2003
ILLINOIS	7/3/2003	7/3/2003

<b>STATES THAT PASSED BOOSTER SEAT PROVISION IN 2003</b>	<b>DATE OF ENACTMENT</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b>
ILLINOIS	7/3/2003	1/1/2004
LOUISIANA	7/7/2003	1/1/2004
MONTANA	4/17/2003	10/1/2003
NEVADA	6/9/2003	6/1/2004
NEW HAMPSHIRE	5/20/2003	1/1/2004
TENNESSEE	6/12/2003	7/1/2004
VERMONT	5/20/2003	6/1/2004
WYOMING	3/7/2003	1/1/2003

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**TEA-21 HIGHWAY SAFETY FUNDING  
FY 2003 FUNDING  
(Dollars)**

<b>State</b>	<b>Section 402 Formula</b>	<b>Section 157 Safety Belt Use - Incentive</b>	<b>Section 157 Safety Belt Use - Innovative</b>	<b>Child Passenger Safety (2003b)</b>	<b>Section 405 Occupant Protection</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Alabama	2,644,568	987,800	1,072,369	128,400	614,050	7,132,534
Alaska	776,938	19,800	356,928	37,709	176,749	12,267,997
Arizona	2,543,267	0	563,470	123,371	0	5,471,717
Arkansas	1,980,829	0	594,879	96,366	0	12,249,417
California	14,937,543	16,504,600	3,569,276	724,320	3,404,903	100,712,833
Colorado	2,505,945	1,087,700	793,172	121,749	0	13,388,449
Connecticut	1,539,122	503,600	594,879	74,639	379,720	15,830,378
Delaware	776,938	33,800	356,928	37,709	176,749	4,195,834
D.C.	776,938	382,100	277,610	37,709	176,749	2,146,238
Florida	7,404,416	2,863,600	2,538,152	359,211	1,566,366	21,313,844
Georgia	4,316,917	1,634,700	1,189,759	209,667	901,616	12,206,775
Hawaii	776,938	277,300	289,508	37,709	176,749	2,289,168
Idaho	947,520	58,700	277,610	45,980	0	2,243,058
Illinois	6,200,090	571,000	1,110,441	300,730	1,463,425	15,443,676
Indiana	3,282,487	1,174,900	861,502	159,339	766,313	23,115,421
Iowa	2,225,147	663,600	753,514	108,107	527,036	6,322,428
Kansas	2,332,704	0	0	113,395	0	3,932,700
Kentucky	2,338,119	259,600	1,031,124	113,376	533,873	6,439,860
Louisiana	2,335,391	0	456,074	113,302	560,552	21,370,871
Maine	776,938	0	0	37,709	176,749	1,486,528
Michigan	5,066,167	2,840,700	1,764,809	245,700	1,202,757	15,953,540
Maryland	2,375,781	2,138,800	680,780	115,215	552,038	8,113,238
Massachusetts	2,835,658	504,000	662,299	137,500	680,371	14,318,430
Minnesota	3,188,413	75,400	951,807	154,814	0	14,693,588
Mississippi	1,817,305	293,200	674,197	88,288	0	11,467,922
Missouri	3,379,351	51,500	778,102	164,401	0	19,817,768
Montana	1,012,515	44,400	0	49,212	231,908	13,612,111

<b>State</b>	<b>Section 402 Formula</b>	<b>Section 157 Safety Belt Use - Incentive</b>	<b>Section 157 Safety Belt Use - Innovative</b>	<b>Child Passenger Safety (2003b)</b>	<b>Section 405 Occupant Protection</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Nebraska	1,551,124	0	317,269	75,381	361,628	3,724,108
Nevada	1,152,815	0	436,245	56,169	0	2,625,485
New Hampshire	776,938	0	277,610	37,709	0	1,784,867
New Jersey	3,656,396	983,400	1,136,360	177,281	865,805	6,819,242
New Mexico	1,282,669	976,300	0	62,281	287,123	9,608,509
New York	8,542,750	3,700,900	1,982,931	414,217	2,078,217	40,638,046
North Carolina	4,127,066	3,404,700	713,855	200,595	885,679	13,079,693
North Dakota	1,071,643	133,000	356,928	52,132	0	6,923,684
Ohio	5,580,657	905,200	1,098,544	270,754	0	31,652,078
Oklahoma	2,424,663	47,400	555,221	117,771	0	4,690,260
Oregon	1,979,084	1,368,300	396,586	96,018	471,542	12,932,683
Pennsylvania	5,971,864	0	2,062,248	289,726	1,468,875	11,646,348
Rhode Island	776,938	0	396,586	37,709	176,749	4,637,156
South Carolina	2,205,900	0	490,909	107,392	0	13,588,441
South Dakota	1,087,347	0	0	0	0	6,416,978
Tennessee	3,071,327	1,710,600	567,911	149,137	0	20,262,234
Texas	11,057,039	1,199,800	4,203,814	536,376	2,373,653	26,417,183
Utah	1,278,682	159,400	370,808	62,156	264,542	3,284,312
Vermont	776,938	0	396,586	37,709	176,749	4,579,265
Virginia	3,456,821	0	1,070,783	167,748	780,827	21,463,762
Washington	3,087,352	1,948,600	872,490	150,001	668,944	9,635,856
West Virginia	1,062,087	0	436,245	51,470	0	9,697,893
Wisconsin	3,177,911	668,700	0	154,334	0	6,906,761
Wyoming	776,938	0	0	0	0	10,820,889
Puerto Rico	1,641,324	291800	336,783	79,573	390,699	8,809,740
BIA	1,165,406	0	0	56,564	0	1,221,970
Am. Samoa	388,469	0	0	18,855	0	407,324
Guam	388,469	0	0	18,855	0	407,324
N. Marianas	388,469	0	0	18,855	88,375	495,699
Virgin Islands	388,469	0	0	18,855	88,375	495,699

<b>TOTAL</b>	155,387,500	50,468,900	40,675,901	7,451,250	25,696,455	683,209,812
	50 States + DC, PR, BIA, 4 territories	34 States + DC, PR	43 States + DC, PR	48 States + DC, Puerto Rico, Indian Nations, and 4 Territories	31 States + DC, PR and 2 Territories	