

Lytt H 590 G



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: JUL - 1 1997

In reply refer to: H-97-23

To the Motion Picture Association of America, the Entertainment Industries Council, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and the National Cartoonists Society (see attached mailing list)

The National Transportation Safety Board recently held a public forum to discuss concerns related to the role of air bags in passenger vehicles, 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.¹ The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation, participated in the Safety Board's 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. Based on testimony given at the forum, the Board believes that your organization can play a positive role in saving lives of the Nation's citizens, particularly children.

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.²

¹ National Transportation Safety Board. 1997. Proceedings of the National Transportation Safety Board public forum on air bags and child passenger safety; March 17-20, 1997; Washington, D.C. Report of Proceedings NTSB/RP-97/01; PB97-917001.

² 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.

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 The "one-size-fits-all" approach to air bag design is obsolete: air bags need to be designed to protect all people in a variety of crash situations.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 precludes 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.

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.

The use of seatbelts and child restraint systems is the most effective means of reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries. 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 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. Visual images in the media of adults and children riding unrestrained or improperly restrained in passenger vehicles do not convey appropriate messages and they counteract government and industry efforts to increase the number of people who use seatbelts and child restraint systems.

At the Safety Board's public forum, the Director of the Federal Office of Road Safety in Australia reported that the Australian entertainment media make an effort to portray seatbelted occupants "unless something terrible happens to them and that's a part of the story." He reported that a comparison with material from the American entertainment media indicated that the American material was "about three times more likely to show unsafe practices than the local [Australian] material."

The Safety Board is aware that the automobile industry has made an effort to portray occupants properly restrained in advertisements for the sale of new passenger vehicles. Volvo recently produced a television advertisement that was developed specifically to educate the public about the importance of putting children in the back seat. Further, when automobile manufacturers are asked to lend passenger vehicles to the television and movie industries, most

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

manufacturers review the script to make sure that all occupants are properly restrained and that children are in the back seat. If the vehicle is to be involved in a frontal crash and it is equipped with air bags, the air bags will deploy when the crash is sufficiently severe.⁴ If the producers are not willing to comply with these requests, the automobile manufacturers generally do not lend the vehicle. The automobile industry pointed out, however, that producers may rent or purchase the passenger vehicle designated in the script; in such cases, the automobile manufacturers have no control over how restraint use is portrayed.

NHTSA has worked with several organizations to influence the U.S. entertainment industry to portray actors as properly restrained when driving or riding in passenger vehicles on screen. In the mid-1980s, the Entertainment Industries Council assisted NHTSA by obtaining commitments from 48 television and movie actors to depict proper seatbelt use whenever they are filmed in passenger vehicles. The Council also distributed educational kits to schools during Buckle-Up America Week in 1988 and has worked with cartoonists and comic strip writers to incorporate the important message of buckling up where applicable.

The Safety Board is aware that the American Coalition for Traffic Safety, a safety organization funded by the automobile industry, plans to conduct a survey of how the movie and television industries depict air bags and seatbelt use. The Safety Board believes that a survey of movies and television is a useful first step toward utilizing the entertainment media to educate the public about the importance of proper child restraint and seatbelt use.

Strong State laws and strict enforcement of those laws are the most important components of a comprehensive program to increase the proper use of child restraints and seatbelts. In addition, the print media and the entertainment industry play essential roles in helping to bring about positive changes in societal attitudes and behavior. Television shows, movies, cartoons, and advertisements that depict adults wearing seatbelts properly and children in the back seat of passenger vehicles in size-appropriate child restraint systems present positive images and reinforce the importance of buckling up. The Safety Board believes that such images can help to increase the proper use of restraint systems. Similarly, the depiction of improper restraint use in combination with a negative outcome can also have an impact on behavior. The Safety Board has also asked the Newspaper Association of America, the National Newspaper Association, and the American Society of Newspaper Editors to report whether seatbelts and child restraints are used in news articles about vehicle crashes.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Motion Picture Association of America, the Entertainment Industries Council, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and the National Cartoonist Society:

Encourage your members to show adults wearing seatbelts properly and children in the back seat of passenger vehicles in size appropriate child restraint systems unless obviously identified or depicted as high risk behavior. (H-97-23)

⁴ According to several automobile industry representatives, automobile manufacturers have been asked to disconnect the air bags in some cases; the manufacturers have refused.

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 recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-97-23 in your reply.

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

By: 
Jim Hall
Chairman

Entertainment Industry

Dr. James Lopez
Executive Director
Academy of Television Arts and Sciences
5220 Lankershim Boulevard
North Hollywood, California 91601

Mr. Jack Valenti
President and Chief Executive Officer
Motion Picture Association of America
15503 Ventura Boulevard
Encino, California 91436

Mr. George Breisacher
President
National Cartoonist Society
10 Columbus Circle, Suite 1620
New York, New York 10019

Mr. Brian Dyak
President and Chief Executive Officer
Entertainment Industries Council
1760 Reston Parkway, Suite 415
Reston, Virginia 22090

ADDRESS CHANGE - 6/03

National Cartoonists
Society
1133 West Morse Blvd.
Suite 201
Wilton Park, FL 32789