



Highlights of [GAO-05-24](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Auto crashes kill or injure millions of people each year. Information about where and why such crashes occur is important in reducing this toll, both for identifying particular hazards and for planning safety efforts at the state and federal levels. Differences in the quality of state traffic data from state to state, however, affect the usability of data for these purposes. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) administers a grant program to help states improve the safety data systems that collect and analyze crash data from police and sheriff's offices and other agencies, and the Congress is considering whether to reauthorize and expand the program. The Senate Appropriations Committee directed GAO to study state systems and the grant program. Accordingly, GAO examined (1) the quality of state crash information, (2) the activities states undertook to improve their traffic records systems and any progress made, and (3) NHTSA's oversight of the grant program.

What GAO Recommends

The Congress may want to consider incorporating into legislation a requirement that states have their traffic safety data systems assessed at least every 5 years. Further, we are recommending that NHTSA improve their management of grant documentation as well as monitoring and oversight of grant funds. The Department of Transportation agreed with the recommendations in this report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-24.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-6570 or SiggerudK@gao.gov.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Improved Monitoring and Oversight of Traffic Safety Data Program Are Needed

What GAO Found

States vary considerably in the extent to which their traffic safety data systems meet recommended criteria used by NHTSA to assess the quality of crash information. These criteria relate to whether the information is timely, consistent, complete, and accurate, as well as to whether it is available to users and integrated with other relevant information, such as that in the driver history files. GAO reviewed systems in 9 states and found, for example, that some states entered crash information into their systems in a matter of weeks, while others took a year or more. While some systems were better than others, all had opportunities for improvement.

States reported carrying out a range of activities to improve their traffic safety data systems with the grants they received from NHTSA. Relatively little is known about the extent to which these activities improved the systems, largely because the documents submitted to NHTSA contained little or no information about what the activities accomplished. The states GAO reviewed used their grant funds for a variety of projects and showed varying degrees of progress. These efforts included completing strategic plans, hiring consultants, and buying equipment to facilitate data collection.

NHTSA officials said their oversight of the grant program complied with the statutory requirements, but for two main reasons, it does not provide a useful picture of what states were accomplishing. First, the agency did not provide adequate guidance to ensure that states provided accurate and complete data on what they were accomplishing with their grants. Second, it did not have an effective process for monitoring progress. The agency has begun to take some actions to strengthen oversight of all its grant programs. If the Congress decides to reauthorize the program, however, additional steps are needed to provide effective oversight of this particular program. GAO also noted that in proposing legislation to reauthorize the program, one requirement was omitted that may be helpful in assessing progress—the requirement for states to have an up-to-date assessment of their traffic data systems.



Source: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Example of police car computers used to speed crash information into state traffic data systems.