

**Remarks Prepared for  
David Strickland, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
National Association of Women Highway  
Safety Leaders 2012 Conference  
Baltimore, MD  
August 25, 2012**

**Thank you for that warm and generous introduction. It's a pleasure to be in your company this evening! I feel right at home knowing how deeply NHTSA and NAWHSL share the commitment to improve highway safety and the passion for saving lives. We are each at our best when we collaborate with our safety partners.**

**I don't know how you all fared this summer, but Lord knows in the Mid-Atlantic we felt the intense heat, day**

**and night. In fact, according to NOAA's National Climatic Data Center, July 2011 through June 2012 was the warmest 12-month period on record in the US.**

**Here in late June, a derecho storm knocked out power for days throughout DC, Maryland, and Virginia—bringing massive trees down on homes, vehicles, and power lines. A lot of people got hot under the collar about a certain power company's response time, and how long it was going to be before the A/C and fans could come back on and food in the fridge and freezer could be safe again.**

**Words like "power outage" held peoples' attention for weeks. But for me, the two words that put a hot coal in my stomach all summer long were "heatstroke fatality." People would say "record heat," but all I could think about was "lost children."**

**In 2011, 33 children across our nation died in hot cars. So far this year, we've lost 23. What happens, when a small child is inadvertently left in a vehicle on a hot day, is literally "a crying shame" that no parent, grandparent, or care-giving driver should ever have to face. It brings devastating grief and mourning, and the painful realization that child heatstroke is 100 percent preventable.**

**NHTSA has made a strong commitment to child safety. This summer I teamed up with Safe Kids Worldwide on a media campaign called "Where's Baby? Look Before You Lock?" to end the deadly threat that heatstroke poses to young children in cars. These fatalities often occur when there's a change in the driver's routine: They're concentrating on other things and forget the**

**little one in the backseat when they lock the vehicle and leave.**

**Secretary LaHood has given his full and strong support to our work on child safety, including our efforts to ensure that parents know how to select and install a car safety seat that's appropriate for their child. The Secretary has also participated in our campaign to end child heatstroke fatalities.**

**So, one of the stories we want all of you to help us tell is a non-story: It's the story of the long hot summer of 2013, when not one child was forgotten in a car in Texas, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee... Instead, they all came out of their car seats, had supper and popsicles or watermelon, and slept through the night with smiles on their faces.**

**I've done a lot of traveling in my time as Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I've seen NAWHSL's support for transportation safety across this country, including your initiatives promoting seat belt use, helmet protection, and driver safety for seniors. I know the value of your outreach to many, many communities.**

**As Administrator for almost three years now, I can assure you: The work of NHTSA's safety partners dramatically expands the reach and effectiveness of our mission in vital ways. I am grateful for these contributions and look forward to future opportunities to advance the safety goals we share.**

**I want to take a moment and speak about several broad trends impacting highway safety today—where we are and where we want to be. I'll start by touching on**

**some fantastic developments in vehicle technology that could save a lot of lives in the future.**

**As you know, at NHTSA we look at traffic safety through data—data that describes the problems, reveals new opportunities, and shows us where all our concerted efforts are saving lives. We are constantly collecting and leveraging data to make driving safer—by enhancing roads and infrastructure, testing vehicles, analyzing and understanding crashes, influencing driver behavior, and advancing automotive technology.**

**Through dedicated research and regulation, NHTSA is working to create a new safety era that features safer vehicle designs and applies emerging technologies.**

**For example, we're now testing the next generation of vehicle-to-vehicle communications (V2V): emerging**

**technology that may soon prevent many crashes from occurring.**

**V2V technologies enable cars to automatically send and receive warnings about impending crashes so that drivers can take action to avoid a collision. This technology has the potential to address approximately 80 percent of the vehicle crash scenarios involving unimpaired drivers. 80 percent! Of course, we want to realize these safety benefits as rapidly as possible.**

**Since 2011, NHTSA and our research partners have been conducting Safety Pilot driver clinics that measure how drivers respond to in-car collision warnings: “Do not pass” alerts, warnings that a vehicle ahead has stopped suddenly, and similar safety messages. An overwhelming majority of drivers (9 out of 10) who have experienced these safety features have a highly**

**favorable opinion of its safety benefits and would like to have it on their personal vehicle.**

**Just this past Tuesday [August 21] Secretary LaHood launched the second phase of our V2V testing—a real-world field test that will continue through the summer of 2013. This effort is based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and includes nearly 3,000 cars, trucks, and buses equipped with vehicle-to-vehicle communications technology.**

**The prospect of integrating V2V communications with increasing levels of vehicle automation could result in the most dramatic safety improvements in our nation's driving history. NHTSA plans to make a decision about the Agency's next steps for vehicle to vehicle technology for passenger vehicles in 2013 and for large commercial vehicles in 2014.**

**I must confess—I'm a huge fan of preempting crashes! At the same time, when I drive home from this conference I have to be realistic. NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey shows that in about 95 percent of serious crashes the event that precipitated the crash was attributed to driver error. I know that all of you are familiar with that list of poor decisions, which includes driving while impaired, speeding, and driving while distracted.**

**In response to these realities, NHTSA periodically launches high visibility national campaigns to change unsafe driving behavior. Our model combines good laws and aggressive law enforcement, coordinated with strong public education messages. For example: Our annual "Click It Or Ticket" effort to encourage seat belt use, the "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" campaign,**

**and our most recent initiative to reduce distracted driving, “Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other.”**

**Distraction has emerged as one of our greatest highway safety challenges. Even though all but 11 states have enacted laws against distracted driving, many drivers continue to talk on their cell phones, text, or surf the Internet—diverting themselves from their primary responsibility: driving.**

**NHTSA is working hard to understand distraction, to find ways to reduce driver workload related to in-vehicle technologies, and to increase public awareness of the risks and consequences. We’ve been focusing on the human-machine interface for drivers because we expect that many more smartphone-based applications will be introduced into vehicles.**

**How exactly do we deal with the safety consequences of people who have grown accustomed to living a digital lifestyle in every aspect of their lives? Many teenagers today are more likely to communicate via text message than conversation. As these teens become drivers, their reliance on mobile devices and constant texting is simply incompatible with safe and focused driving.**

**To meet the challenge, NHTSA is finalizing specific guidelines for automakers to help them develop in-vehicle electronic devices that provide the features consumers want, without distracting the driver's attention.**

**Last March, we conducted hearings on our proposed guidelines across the country and gathered responses**

**from automakers and other stakeholders. We are now looking ahead to a collaborative solution that directly addresses the dangerous connection between electronic devices and distraction.**

**Our foremost goal is to aid automakers in reducing the complexity and amount of time it takes to use onboard electronic devices. Our proposed guidelines recommend that devices be designed so they can be operated with only one hand and with limited glances away from the road.**

**We recommend limiting both the amount of manual inputs needed to operate a device and unnecessary visual information in the driver's field of view.**

**We also recommend that certain electronic devices be disabled while driving, unless the devices are intended**

**for passenger use and cannot be seen or accessed by the driver. These include tasks that can significantly distract drivers, such as text messaging and Internet browsing. NHTSA is moving forward quickly on this issue.**

**For many of us here, data drives our safety efforts, one way or another. For NHTSA, it supports our mission, enables us to understand and develop opportunities, and to meet serious safety challenges—such as distracted driving, impaired driving, collisions, and more.**

**But I know everyone here also appreciates that a data point in highway safety is never just a data point. There is no such thing as a meaningless statistic because every data point tells a human story. Moreover, each data**

**point tells the difference between a good story and a terrible one.**

**Two weeks ago, NHTSA lost a member of our family: Jeff Woods, a colleague who was killed in an early morning motor vehicle crash near his home. Jeff was not a data point, but a friend, an engineer, a musician, and a beloved human being in a story we're all working to change.**

**For all of us who are passionate about highway safety, let's look to the future with renewed vigor for the excitement of ensuring safe journeys for every person in our country. Help me, help NHTSA, and help your communities tell some great human stories:**

- **The kids come home from the prom safely.**

- **The soccer dad gets the team to the pizza parlor.**
- **The couple married for 60 years gets through the busy intersection.**
- **The pedestrian simply crosses the street in safety.**

**Thank you.**