

**KEEPING THE SAFETY IN SAFETEA:  
LIFE-SAVING VEHICLE SAFETY PROVISIONS  
ARE LONG-OVERDUE AND FEASIBLE**



March 2004

## **Acknowledgments**

This report was researched and written by Laura MacCleery, Morgan Lynn, Asa Tapley and Matt Pelkey. Invaluable editorial assistance, direction, and communications assistance were provided by Joan Claybrook, Booth Gunter, LuAnn Canipe, Shannon Little and Angela Bradbery.

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# KEEPING THE SAFETY IN SAFETEA: LIFE-SAVING VEHICLE SAFETY PROVISIONS ARE LONG-OVERDUE AND FEASIBLE

## *Introduction*

The bipartisan McCain-Hollings-DeWine-Snowe vehicle safety provisions in S.1072, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA), would prevent thousands of needless deaths on American roads each year.

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Americans from ages 2 to 33, causing nearly 42,000 deaths and 3 million injuries each year. The numbers of Americans killed on the road remains at an unconscionably high level. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates the direct cost in worker productivity and other economic losses from vehicle crashes is \$230 billion each year (in 2000 dollars), or \$820 for every man, woman and child in the U.S.

The problem is only getting worse. In 2002, highway deaths reached their highest level since 1990, and an astounding 82 percent of the increase in deaths between 2001 and 2002 occurred in rollover crashes. SUVs, pickups and vans now make up 49 percent of new passenger sales and 36 percent of registered motor vehicles – a 70 percent increase between 1990 and 2000. Although NHTSA and the auto industry have known about the dangers of vehicle rollover and aggressivity for several decades, safety rules continue to lag behind these market trends.

Federal regulators acknowledge that the number of lives lost is far too high. Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator of NHTSA, predicted last year in *Newsday* that the total dead could reach **50,000 annually** in 2008. “*This is a Vietnam War every year,*” he said. “*That’s just not tolerable.*”

In 2000, Congress quickly passed the Transportation, Recall Enhancement, Accountability and Documentation (TREAD) Act in the wake of the Ford/Firestone tragedy – but as members stated on the floor, the bill was a first step, but major vehicle safety issues would have to be revisited. That bill, and NHTSA’s subsequent tire recall, did not address increasing vehicle-related hazards from the growing popularity of SUVs, with any new safety standards for these vehicles.

**Since the TREAD Act was passed in 2000, 30,755 people have died in rollover crashes – or a capacity crowd at Fenway Park. This death toll is more than 150 times the number (200) killed in the Ford/Firestone tragedy.**

Yet rollovers are among the most survivable kinds of crashes, because the change in velocity means that impacts typically are in the range of 12 to 20 mph. The lack of good safety design and occupant protection turns these crashes into killers.

Left unattended, as they have been for more than two decades, rollover crashes and crashes involving vehicle mismatch will claim more lives each year. But SUVs need not be so dangerous for occupants and others— technologies available in numerous vehicles currently on the market support a panoply of obvious fixes to build a better, safer vehicle for American families.

**Title 4 of SAFETEA includes the following “top ten” motor vehicle safety measures:**

- 1) Making Rollover-Prone Vehicles More Stable;**
- 2) Preventing Serious, Life-Threatening Injuries with Better Protection During a Rollover Crash;**
- 3) Improving Government Frontal Crash Tests to Prevent Intrusions and Injuries in the Passenger Compartment;**
- 4) Surviving Lethal Side Impact Crashes;**
- 5) Addressing the Rising Death and Injury Toll that Occurs When Mismatched Vehicles Collide;**
- 6) Reducing the Dangers of Transporting Children and Others in Unsafe 15-Passenger Vans;**
- 7) Stopping Unnecessary Child Deaths and Injuries in and Around Vehicles;**
- 8) Fixing a Flat – Completing the Unfinished Tire Safety Improvements Required in the TREAD Act;**
- 9) Buckling-Up with Safer, More Effective Restraint Systems;**
- 10) Providing Consumers with Better Safety Information on the Car at the Point-of-Sale.**

*All 10 address the right priorities:  
The bill would save thousands of lives cost-effectively  
with safety design improvements and technologies available today.*

The bipartisan safety provisions in S.1072, sponsored by Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), and including significant contributions from Senators Olympia Snowe (R.-Maine) and Mike DeWine (R.-OH), would complete the unfinished business of TREAD.

Hundreds of SUV owners who signed up for our campaign at [www.betterSUV.org](http://www.betterSUV.org) believe that American automakers *can* build a safer vehicle. So do crash survivors, who have testified to the tragedies in their lives – dealing with the wrenching deaths of family members and ongoing pain from serious injuries.

As Senator McCain said on the floor of the Senate on Oct. 11, 2000, during the vote on the TREAD Act:

*I say to my colleagues again that this issue isn't over. Tragically, I am in fear that there will be more deaths and injuries on America's highways before we finally make it much safer for Americans to be on America's highways.*

Millions of dangerous vehicles still remain on the highway, and people are dying in them. These losses are readily preventable with improved safety design. It is time to make a better vehicle for all Americans.

***SUV Owners Speak Out for Better Safety***

**Lynn Fuller, a California mother of 4 and driver of a 1997 Chevrolet Suburban:**

We need an extra-large vehicle for our children and special needs equipment, as well as dogs. We have been frustrated for years by the lack of fuel-efficient, safe vehicle choices that meet our needs. The refusal of the Detroit automakers to budge on fuel efficiency is inexcusable and the SUV safety problems are appalling....I think the SUV safety and fuel economy problems that have been allowed to mushroom over the last decade are a public policy disaster that shows the worst side of the automakers and an apathetic federal regulatory system.