

## ***Public Opinion on Truck Safety***

### **Excerpts from Fifth Harris Survey on Federal Role in Public Protection**

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (“Advocates”), the leading national highway safety advocacy group, is an alliance of consumer, health, safety and insurance groups working together to advance highway and auto safety. In May 1996, Advocates commissioned the first in a series of in-depth polls of national public opinion on key issues affecting highway and auto safety. In May of 2004, Advocates commissioned the fifth such survey by Louis Harris. The 2004 survey measures trends in public opinion over the past three-to-eight years on certain issues and asks questions for the first time on several other topics.

These surveys deal with the basic parameters of public consent in America for federal regulation in setting and enforcing standards that can make highway and auto travel safer. As with earlier waves, this year’s survey covers a broad spectrum of issues, including how important Americans feel the role of government should be in setting standards and passing policies and legislation on highway safety.

#### **Substance of This Year’s Survey**

Specifically, this year’s study focused on five key areas:

- (1) Preventing and protecting passengers in rollover crashes
- (2) Preventing ejection from vehicles during a crash
- (3) Consumer information about rollover crashes
- (4) Vehicle safety regulations to protect all members of the family
- (5) Truck safety regulation on the highways

#### **Methodology**

A total of 1003 telephone interviews were completed by telephone with randomly selected adults aged 18 years and older between May 14, 2004 and June 3, 2004 by the Peter Harris Research Group on behalf of Louis Harris. Every household in the nation with a telephone had roughly an equal chance to participate in the survey.

The interview averaged 15.5 minutes in length. At the 95% level of confidence, the margin of error for a representative, national cross-section survey of 1003 respondents is approximately  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points. A complete report on the technical aspects of the study is contained in Appendix B of this report.

While the study was conducted at the initiation of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, the responsibility of the professionalism of the study and the findings reached rests squarely on Louis Harris, who was ably assisted by the Peter Harris Research Group. All of the results are available to the public.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **6. The Problem of Trucks and Highway Safety**

Historically, surveys for Advocates have examined safety issues related to big trucks. This year's survey examined the following issues:

- **Truck Driver Fatigue.** Specifically, the survey asked about the perennial problem of truck driver fatigue. The temptation probably will always exist of having drivers under the influence of heavy doses of caffeine or drugs who can increase the number of hours they drive to save money on stops and decrease the number of relief drivers needed. However, the seriousness of fatigued drivers not being able to control their huge vehicles poses an obvious major danger on the highways. Drivers keep paper logs, which can be altered to hide their fatigue transgressions. However, there are black boxes, which can be installed in trucks, which can enforce hours of service rules. Many trucks now have them at a cost of only a few hundred dollars. *An 84% to 13% majority of the public favors the mandatory installation of the black boxes on all trucks. This is up marginally from the 81% to 17% majority who felt that way three years ago.*
- **Bigger, Heavier Truck Loads.** Another perennial problem is the size and weight of trucks allowed on highways. Some segments of the trucking industry continue to press for increasing federal and state weight laws to allow for bigger, heavier loads. *By 77% to 16%, the public opposes increasing truck weight limits.* The 2004 survey continues to show a large majority of the public opposing increases in truck weight limits and allowing bigger rigs to share the road.
- **Multiple Trailers.** Finally, people were asked about trucks pulling two or more trailers, whether they are as safe as trucks pulling one trailer. *The public comes down decisively with 80% saying they feel that trucks with two or more trailers are less safe.*

22. (T) One of the causes of truck crashes is driver fatigue. Rules governing the hours a truck driver spends driving a truck are difficult to enforce because drivers keep paper logs that can easily be tampered with or falsified. Technology exists like black boxes, costing a few hundred dollars that can enforce driving rules. Many trucks are already equipped with these black boxes. Would you favor or oppose mandatory installation of such black boxes in big trucks that travel long distances with heavy loads?

	1996	2004
	%	%
Favor	81	84
Oppose	17	13
Not sure	2	3

23. (T) Right now there are federal laws that control the size and weight of trucks allowed on highways. The trucking industry would like to change the laws to allow bigger, heavier trucks. Do you support or oppose allowing trucks to carry bigger loads?

	1996	2004
	%	%
Support	7	16
Oppose	88	77
Not sure	5	7

24. Do you think that trucks pulling two or more trailers are safer, just as safe, or less safe than trucks pulling only one trailer?

	2004
	%
Safer	1
Just as safe	15
Less safe	80
Not sure	4