



Stuck In Reverse: **SUV Sales Explosion Threatens Both Safety and Fuel Economy**

Automakers took advantage of low fuel economy standards for light trucks (a category historically reserved for work vehicles) by aggressively promoting and marketing sport utility vehicles (SUVs). But the light truck explosion of the 1990's is proving disastrous: recent government data show that SUVs now are threatening the major achievements of the past 30 years in both fuel economy and safety.

SUV Upsurge Swaps Overall Fuel Economy Gains for Losses

- Total average fuel economy improvement for the U.S. vehicle fleet peaked in 1988, and has since declined.
- The upsurge in light trucks (SUVs, vans and pickups), which average 6 mpg less than cars, is to blame for the decline in fuel economy of the overall vehicle fleet.¹
- Too-high fuel consumption ranked second in a list of all driver complaints gathered in a May 2003 J.D. Power and Associates poll.²

SUV Proliferation Is Also Rolling Back the Clock on Safety

- While guzzling more than a fair share of the nation's oil supply, SUVs also drive up highway fatalities. NHTSA's spring 2003 figures show the number of people killed in traffic crashes increased 1.7 percent last year, to the highest level since 1990: 42,850 people were killed on the highway last year, up from 42,116 in 2001.
- In 2002, SUV and pickup rollover deaths accounted for 46 percent of the increase in all occupant fatalities and 78 percent of the increase in passenger vehicle rollover fatalities.³
- Light truck fatalities are replacing passenger car fatalities, meaning deaths in SUV and pickup rollovers are more than offsetting declines in deaths of passenger car occupants.⁴
- In frontal crashes, SUVs kill 4.3 car drivers for every one SUV driver who is killed, and in near-side crashes, SUVs kill 16.3 car drivers, a kill rate twice that of cars.⁵

Detroit Can Do Better for SUV Owners and the Nation

As currently designed, SUVs are a hazard for their drivers and others on the road, and increase the nation's dependence on foreign oil. Automakers have the technology to fix and improve the fuel economy and safety externalities imposed by SUVs, yet only Congress could make them choose to act, by:

- Addressing the rollover epidemic by requiring rollover crashworthiness protections in light trucks and cars, and requiring a minimum rollover stability standard;
- Putting America back on the road to oil savings by raising the light truck fuel economy standard.

Americans Deserve Safer, More Fuel-Efficient SUVs.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Light-Duty Automotive Technology and Fuel Economy Trends: 1975 Through 2003," EPA420-R03-006, April 2003.

² Hakim, Danny "Whether a Hummer or a Hybrid, the Big Complaint Is Fuel Use," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2003.

³ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Preliminary Estimates of 2002 Highway Fatalities*, April 2003.

⁴ National Center for Statistics and Analysis, *Characteristics of Rollover Crashes*, April 2002, at 3 and 13.

⁵ Dr. Jeffrey Runge, "Automotive News World Congress: Meeting the Safety Challenge," Jan. 14, 2003, at 3.