

**Remarks for Debbie Hersman
Motor Vehicle Fatality Estimates Press Conference
February 15, 2017
Washington, D.C.**

Thank you for joining us today.

In a few minutes, you will hear from one of our advocates, Laura Carney. Laura lost her father in a crash in 2003. She has courageously agreed to speak with you today, because while the data tell us we have a long way to go, personal stories remind us why we need to get there.

I wish I could tell you that we are doing better than we were in 2003, when Laura lost her dad.

Instead, I have to tell you that we are doing almost as poorly as we were then, despite incredible safety advancements, education campaigns and legislative actions.

According to National Safety Council preliminary estimates, 40,000 people died on our roadways last year. That is a 6% increase over 2015, and a 14% increase over 2014.

Preliminary reports show that 2016 was the deadliest year on our roadways since 2007, and the two-year incline is the steepest we have experienced since 1964 – 53 years.

Let me put that in perspective for you.

40,000 people would fill 11 Titanic's, nearly two Empire State buildings, and surpasses the average daily attendance at Wrigley Field last year as the Chicago Cubs chased their World Series title.

Think about all the traffic safety advancements we have made in 53 years. The timeline displayed here (POINT TO HISTORICAL TRENDS POSTER NEAR THE PODIUM) provides an overview.

Since 1964, we have passed seat belt, graduated licensing and drunk driving laws, and made airbags and electronic stability control required features. Vehicles today are designed not only to lessen the impact of crashes, but in some cases, prevent the crash from happening at all.

What has not changed is our human fallibility.

For causation, you need to look at the individual reports, but the 2015 data showed increases in distraction- and speed-related fatalities, a rise in deaths among unbelted occupants, vulnerable road users and teen drivers.

Yes, there is more exposure, but a 3% increase in miles driven does not track with the 6% increase in deaths.

Recently the National Safety Council polled 2,000 drivers across the United States to gain insight into what is going on behind the wheel. The results were disheartening.

Let's start with good news.

Of all the things the public worries about, driving was rightly at the top of the list – 83% of those we surveyed believe driving is a safety concern – more so than other commonly reported fears, such as gun violence, disease and commercial airline travel.

Respondents also said drunk drivers are their #1 concern, followed closely by distracted drivers. These are both serious safety issues that the driving public should focus on.

However, we found drivers' concerns are not prompting them to adopt safer behaviors themselves.

In the last three months, 10% of drivers said they had driven after they felt like they were too drunk to be behind the wheel. Of those who have

driven while intoxicated, 48% said they crossed the median, dozed off or drifted onto the shoulder. 43% were involved in a crash.

76% are concerned that legalizing marijuana will negatively impact traffic safety. Yet, 13% said they have driven under the influence of either recreational or medical marijuana in the last month.

47% feel it is safe to send text messages – either manually or through voice dictation.

16% said they do not buckle up on every trip, and 31% do not make their passengers buckle up every time.

16% of drivers would prefer to shut off safety features because they are confusing, irritating or give them false activations.

25% are comfortable speeding on residential streets, where speed limits are often 25-35 mph. 9% even told us they would go at least 10 mph over the speed limit in a school zone.

These results underscore how our complacency is killing us – the top three killers are: speed, alcohol and distraction.

We can keep asking ourselves “Why” – but you look at these survey results, and “Why” may not be the most important question anymore – because the same things that have killed us for decades are still killing us. We have to start asking ourselves “What more can we do?”

If a Titanic-size ship sank every day for 11 days, we would pull every marine vessel out of the water. If the foundation of two skyscrapers buckled, we would overhaul architectural design and construction.

Where is our outrage over losing as many as 109 people a day to car crashes?

40,000 deaths has to be a call to action.

We know what to do, we just need to do it.

There are 40,000 reasons to adopt the recommendations we are making.

More than 10,000 people die every year in drunk driving crashes.

Therefore, the National Safety Council is calling for mandatory ignition interlocks for first-time offenders, and national education efforts to help drivers understand that impairment begins with the first drink.

Ignition interlocks and better education can help us get to zero.

Speeding is a factor in nearly 30% of all fatal crashes – either going over the posted speed limit or driving too fast for conditions. Therefore, the National Safety Council is calling on all cities and municipalities to use automated enforcement technologies, including red light and speed cameras, wherever possible – particularly at intersections.

More than 50 percent of the combined fatal and injury crashes annually occur at intersections.

Automated enforcement and red light cameras can help us get to zero.

At least 3,000 people each year are killed in distraction-related crashes, and many of them involve cell phone use. We all know that number is under-reported. The National Safety Council is renewing its call for a total ban on all cell phone use – including hands-free – for all drivers.

Banning all cell phone use will help get us to zero.

Nearly half of all people killed in car crashes were unrestrained. The National Safety Council is calling for all seat belt laws to be immediately upgraded from secondary to primary enforcement, and for those laws to extend to every passenger in every seating position.

Strong seat belt laws can get us to zero.

Nearly 4,000 people are killed in teen driver crashes. The National Safety Council is calling for every state to implement three-tiered Graduated Driver Licensing systems that extend to all new drivers younger than 21 – not just to those younger than 18. Inexperience is inexperience, regardless of age.

Stronger, more inclusive GDL systems would help us get to zero.

More than 5,000 motorcyclists are killed every year; more than 5,300 pedestrians are killed. The National Safety Council is calling for motorcycle helmet laws to be mandatory or reinstated and for every community to adopt comprehensive pedestrian safety programs. This can help us get to zero.

94% of crashes are due to human error. The National Safety Council is calling for safety features such as backup cameras, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping assist, adaptive cruise control, blind-spot monitoring and adaptive headlights to be standardized and to accelerate equipping all newly manufactured vehicles with technology that can intervene or mitigate crash risk.

These safety systems can help us get to zero.

The reporters here today are getting a sneak peek at something we will release next week –a first-of-its-kind virtual reality app that gives drivers a tutorial of driver assistance technologies. Our cars are capable of truly amazing, life-saving things, but the systems are only effective if we know how to use them. Virtual reality allows drivers not only to “see” these systems, but almost reach out and touch them.

NSC developed the app for both Android and Apple. I encourage you to give the goggles a try.

Strong laws cannot replace personal responsibility. We are accountable for our safety.

It starts with putting our cell phones away, wearing our seat belts, obeying the posted speed limits, helping our teens get the experience they need, choosing not to drink, and designating a sober, drug-free driver.

We can learn about our safety systems so we know how to use them.

We can get to zero if we each commit to do so.

Maya Angelou once wrote, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

We cannot rewrite history or bring back those we have lost. But we can have the audacity to do what needs to be done. 40,000 deaths does not need to be our new normal. We can create meaning from tragedy if we trade in our complacency for courage.

Our next speaker is a living example of how to do just that. Since losing her father in 2003, Laura has worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the dangers of cell phone use behind the wheel. She has dedicated countless hours and resources to making sure no one else experiences the horror of losing someone they love in an entirely preventable crash.

I want to personally thank you, Laura, not only for being here, but also for sharing your story. Your father's legacy will live on through you and the wonderful work you are doing.

Thank you all for joining us, and please welcome Laura Carney.

