

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS**

### **“A Survey of the Attitudes of the American People on Highway & Auto Safety” *Wave Five of a Periodic Tracking Survey***

*A Public Opinion Poll conducted by*

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*For*

**ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY**

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Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, health, safety and insurance groups working together to advance highway and auto safety, recently sought to determine how Americans feel about specific highway and auto safety issues, especially as they relate to motor vehicle safety and to regulatory inventions. To do so, Advocates commissioned a well-known national pollster, Louis Harris, to survey a cross-section of 1,003 adults between May 14 and June 3, 2004. This is the fifth poll Harris has conducted for Advocates.

These surveys have dealt 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 improving consumer information about motor vehicle safety. Some of the key findings of the latest public opinion survey are:

#### **Strong Mandate for Federal Role in Highway and Auto Safety**

By a sound majority, 91% of Americans strongly support a strong federal government role in setting uniform highway and auto safety standards. As in preceding polls, the percent of those who feel federal involvement is “very important” is greatest among women, minorities and adults over the age of 30.

#### **Broad Support for Rollover Standard to Prevent or Reduce Injuries**

Each year, crashes involving the rollover of vehicles result in more than 10,000 deaths, representing about one fourth of all deaths from motor vehicles. Unfortunately, no government regulations exist to prevent rollover in passenger vehicles, including SUVs. Also, regulations to protect occupants in rollover crashes when they do happen are weak and decades-old.

- *Overall, a 6 to 1 majority of the public (84% to 13%) express the view that “the government should create safety rules that require manufacturers to make all passenger vehicles including SUVs more stable and less likely to roll over.”*

- *Significantly, 85% of SUV owners are aware of the rollover problem, and favor such government action by 82% to 14%.*
- *86% of the American people say they are familiar with the SUV rollover problem.*
- *Only 31% are aware of a government website that has contains customer information about how likely it is for various types of vehicles to roll over.*
- *83% to 14% favor requiring stickers to be placed on the windshield of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over.*

Another innovation tested in the survey is Electronic Stability Control (“ESC”) devices that in certain circumstances can help prevent vehicle rollovers. *A 55% to 39% majority nationwide favors the government requiring ESC devices to be installed in new cars in the future.*

### **Broad Based Support on other Safety Measures**

Three other measures that received strong public support were:

- 1) *Improved Seatbelts--An 82% to 17% majority nationwide would like to see the government require improvements in seat belts to better protect passengers during rollovers.*
- 2) *Stronger Roof Standard--An 83% majority “wants the government to require a major upgrading of roof safety standards to withstand the weight of the car when it rolls over.”*
- 3) *Mismatched Collisions between SUVs and Smaller Cars--Among the public as a whole, 83% are concerned about the damage caused when SUVs collide with smaller vehicles.*

### **Preventing Passenger Ejection**

The issue of passenger ejection received broad-based support. Not only do Americans favor action by the federal government to set better standards, but they also strongly support installation of safety features that could help prevent passenger ejection:

- *A 72% to 24% majority believes “the government should set standards for auto manufacturers to prevent people from being ejected from motor vehicles in crashes.”*
- *81% favor “stronger vehicle roofs so that windshields don’t pop out of the frame so easily during a crash.”*
- *81% support safer door locks and latches so that doors to not fly open in crashes.*
- *78% also favor “stronger side door window glass, like that in windshields, that won’t crumble in a crash.”*
- *70% support “side air bag curtains that drop from the vehicle roof and come between the person and the side door and window.”*
- *85% favor “the government requiring better seat belts to prevent people from being ejected in crashes.”*

## **Making Safety Improvements Mandatory and Willingness to Pay More for Them**

More than two out of three Americans (72%) said that safety features should be offered as standard equipment on all motor vehicles.

Survey respondents were asked how much more money they would be willing to pay for vehicle safety improvements that would prevent rollovers, provide better roof crush protection, and upgrade side impact protection. *Back in 1996, 75% of the people said they would pay the extra money. Now, in 2004, fully 91% said they would pay \$200 to \$300 more for safety improvements.*

## **Addressing Auto Safety Concerns for Children**

With motor vehicle crashes the leading cause of death for our children, survey respondents indicated substantial support for improved automobile safety for children.

**Improved Child Safety Seats.** *A substantial 79% to 14% majority believes a permanent fold-out seat built into the back seats would be more convenient and easier to use than the separate seat they now have to attach for themselves.*

**Eliminating Blind Spots.** *An overwhelming 90% of the American people would like to have some type of equipment in their new car to provide better visibility directly behind the vehicle and decrease the likelihood of backing over children.*

**Making it Illegal to Leave Children Alone in Parked Cars.** *Ninety percent (90%) of the public would favor state laws that would make it illegal for any parent to leave a child alone in a parked vehicle.*

In addition to state laws, the survey respondents were asked about their support for the installation of technology in vehicles, such as a buzzer that would alert the driver when a child is left in the back seat.

- *An 82% to 17% majority would favor the installation of such a warning device.*

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

This year's survey examined the following issues:

- **Truck Driver Fatigue.** *An 84% to 13% majority of the public favors the mandatory installation of black boxes on all trucks, which can enforce hours of service rules. This would cut down on drivers attempting to increase the number of hours they drive above legal limits.*
- **Bigger, Heavier Truck 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.** *80% of the public says trucks with two or more trailers are less safe.*