



**ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
AND AUTO SAFETY**

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**17 HOUSE MEMBERS PROUD FEDERAL SAFETY AGENCY TO ISSUE STRONG  
VEHICLE SAFETY STANDARDS DIRECTED IN 2005 SAFETY ACT**

Expressing serious concerns about the potential for weak vehicle safety standards and the growing problem of rollover deaths and injuries, 17 Democratic and Republican Members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The bi-partisan letter urges the federal agency to issue “strong and effective safety standards” as enacted in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), in August 2005.

The specific vehicle safety rulemakings include rollover, occupant ejection, roof strength and side impact protection. The Members signing the letter call for the safety rules to be addressed in a “comprehensive fashion” by the agency, rather than as “stand-alone”. Leading the oversight effort are several Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee who championed enactment of these vehicle safety provisions in 2005 including Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL), chair of the Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee and Rep. Mary Bono (R-CA) as well as Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA). Also signing the letter were Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY); Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV); Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE); Rep. Mike Doyle (D-PA); Rep. Jay Inslee (D-WA); Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA); Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA); Rep. Virgil Goode (R-VA); Rep. Jason Altmire (D-PA); Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI); Rep. Gene Green (D-TX); Rep. Michael Arcuri (D-NY); and Rep. Paul Gillmor (R-OH).

Commending the committee leaders for organizing the letter to NHTSA, Jacqueline Gillan, vice president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, said, “It took bi-partisan support to get these provisions enacted into law and it will take bi-partisan action to ensure they meet the spirit and the letter of the law. This letter clearly signals to the agency that Congress is watching and waiting for effective safety rules that will save lives and prevent disabling injuries.”

Annually over 10,500 people die on the nation’s roads due to rollover, a major public health problem. While rollover occurs in only about 3 percent of all crashes it accounts for a third of all occupant deaths. Promulgating a strong roof crush standard that takes into consideration occupant ejection, the letter states, will “prevent the failure of doors, windows and shoulder belts” during a rollover crash.

Joan Claybrook, president of Public Citizen and former NHTSA Administrator, commented specifically on the weakness of the agency's recent proposal on changing the standard for roof crush. "Safety groups are discouraged that NHTSA is dramatically minimizing the life-saving potential of this rule. Proof of this is in the fact that many cars already meet the agency's proposed rule. All of these vehicle rulemakings could save thousands of lives every year if done right. We have the technology but NHTSA lacks the political will."

The proposed rule issued by the agency on July 15, 2005 is so weak that it is estimated that as few as 13, but no more than 44 lives will be saved. Furthermore, the proposal continues to test roof strength using windshield and window glazing to provide support even though in real world crashes the windshield pops out and the glazing breaks. Congress also directed the agency to upgrade roof strength on both sides of the vehicle but the proposal only requires testing on one side.

Safety groups and safety technology suppliers worked together to support passage of the SAFETEA-LU provisions in 2005. Bob Hurley of the Enhanced Protective Glass Automotive Association stated, "We applaud this bipartisan effort led by Representatives Bono and Rush. This letter will send a strong signal to NHTSA that key Members of Congress are working to ensure that the agency adopt performance standards that will result in important protections for the driving public. Enacting these provisions in SAFETEA-LU was the first step. In the months ahead, Congress must continue its oversight role so strong vehicle safety standards will be adopted on schedule."

A copy of the Congressional letter to NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason is attached.

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