



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
AND AUTO SAFETY

**Remarks of Judith Lee Stone  
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National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running  
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Recently the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) released the annual motor vehicle fatality toll for 2006 that indicates minor overall improvement over 2005, but the total number of fatalities last year – 42,642 -- is still one of the largest in the last decade. The small decrease clearly represents neither steady nor sustained progress toward addressing the number one killer of all Americans between the ages of 4 and 34.

I see two major ironies in these numbers, related to today's topic: First, the number of deaths, and the death rate -- 1.42 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled -- still leave the U.S. lagging behind other industrialized nations throughout the world.

Within a few days of NHTSA's announcement, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Transport Forum reported that the U.S. ranks 42nd out of 48 countries in motor vehicle deaths, based on number of fatalities per capita. The OECD report shows that Australia, Britain, France, Germany and Japan dramatically outperformed the U.S. in deaths per capita, and when measuring lowest death rates by miles driven, the U.S. ranked only 11th.

Our low global ranking may come as a surprise to some. The second irony that occurs to me is that most of the countries that do better than the U.S. in getting a handle on this major public health problem have been benefiting from wide use of automated enforcement, usually without public opposition, for decades. So we shouldn't be surprised they do better than we do. Why wouldn't governments struggling to contain costs and looking for effective ways to protect families choose readily-available technologies that lead to safer roads and neighborhoods, and why wouldn't they see the results of their actions in the bottom line?

If you knew there was a proven technological application that would cure a life-threatening disease diagnosed by your doctor, would you settle for anything less in the hospital?

In this country, we know the solutions to reducing highway deaths and injuries but it seems we are often lacking the political leadership to enact the necessary laws and regulations to do so. We need to construct a much better safety policy infrastructure that is then vigorously enforced, if we want sizeable reductions in the annual motor vehicle crash and fatality picture.

With photo enforcement now being used in a majority of states and over 200 localities, there may be an assumption that the U.S. is implementing this technology as effectively as possible. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and there is a need for federal leadership and positive guidance to the states.

Only 17 states and the District of Columbia have enabling legislation to permit and define how photo enforcement should be used. And, only three states have passed such legislation in recent years. Despite overwhelming evidence of the effectiveness of photo enforcement to combat red light running and speeding both here and abroad, there has been very little encouragement to our state legislatures for taking such action from the federal level.

Growth in the use of automated enforcement has come almost entirely from communities – having already appealed to state representatives, but unwilling to wait any longer – that have proceeded with implementing programs without state authorization. These systems are working well throughout the nation, reducing crashes, deaths and injuries. Automated enforcement is predictably effective and a proven highway safety vaccine.

The majority of Americans agree that enforcement on our roadways is too lax. Poll after poll, including surveys conducted for my own organization by Lou Harris starting nearly 10 years ago, indicate high levels of support for automated enforcement to stop red light running and speeding. The politicians and other government leaders need not worry about a backlash.

As a member of the Advisory Board of the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running and the President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, I want to commend this report, *Focus on Safety*, and am glad it is being sent to the National Surface Transportation Commission. I urge the Commission to stress the importance of state enabling legislation by recommending in their report to

Congress that states adopt such legislation to authorize the use of photo enforcement for red light running and speeding. While every American community may not need or choose to use automated enforcement, it should be an option that is available at the determination of law enforcement and traffic control experts in each jurisdiction throughout the country.

Thank you.

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*Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety is an alliance of consumer, health and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to make America's roads safer. For more information, please visit [www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org).*