

Press Release

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SCHAKOWSKY CALLS ON CONGRESS, NHTSA TO TRACK AND REDUCE MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, today called on Congress and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration to reduce motor vehicle accidents at a hearing on the reauthorization of the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. Representative Schakowsky also recommended that NHTSA begin tracking injuries and fatalities in non-traffic related automobile accidents.

Representative Schakowsky's full statement is below:

"Over the past three years, more than 125,000 people died in motor vehicle crashes. Nearly nine million more people were injured during that time. Mind you, those numbers do not include children who were injured or killed in and around cars that were not in traffic."

"Currently, NHTSA does not track injuries and fatalities in non-traffic, non-crash related car accidents. The best governmental statistics we can reference come from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study that found that an estimated 9,160 children suffered nonfatal injuries and 78 children were killed in non-traffic accidents between July 2000 and June 2001."

"Because there are no official statistics kept by NHTSA, one of our witnesses, Janette Fennell, took it upon herself to collect every report of every non-traffic accident she could find in order to paint a picture of the severity of the problem.. After personally scouring news reports, she found that in 2004 alone, there were at least 523 children who were involved in non-traffic, non-crash related incidents, and at least 165 of those children died. Those numbers - reflecting only the stories picked up by the press - are cause for alarm. Right now, we can only imagine how staggering they truly are. And, we can only imagine how devastating each accident is to each family affected."

"Not only do I think we need to count every accident - whether in a driveway or on the highway, I also think that we must do everything we can in order to limit accidents that are otherwise preventable and to ensure that vehicles - again, on and off the road - are as safe as possible. While I think everyone is in agreement that we need to do all that we can do to make sure that drivers and passengers are wearing their seat belts and that are impaired drivers are off the road, manufacturers and NHTSA also need to do whatever they can to make sure that the safety factors of the vehicles are addressed as well. Our witnesses are right: it will make a significant difference in reducing the seriousness of injuries and number of deaths on the road if we can increase "personal responsibility." However, I do not believe that manufacturers and NHTSA are not absolved of their responsibilities just because drivers' behaviors contribute to accidents."

"Increasingly, we are seeing problems stemming from the fact that people are buying bigger and more powerful vehicles. In fact, half of new vehicles purchased are SUVs, vans, and pickup trucks. SUVs accounted for 1 in 4 cars sold in 2003 alone. This has led to an increased number of rollover accidents. Deaths in SUV rollovers increased by 7 percent between 2003 and 2004, from 2,639 to 2,821. Between 1992 and 2004, rollover deaths in SUVs increased by an astounding 238 percent. It is no surprise that with increases like that, rollover deaths currently account for one-third of all passenger occupant fatalities."

"And, with SUVs growing in size, their rear blindspots have also become larger. Some SUVs have blindspots as deep as 50 feet, so large that 20 children can be hidden behind them. In 2004, we lost more than 100 children to back-over accidents alone because they went unseen. Many of these accidents were in families' own driveways."

"We must approach the problem of increasing rollovers and blindspots, along with other safety issues we know about, by working on ways to prevent accidents from happening,

as well as improving protections for people in the cases that do occur."□□ □□

"There are a number of good policy provisions in the Senate highway bill that would address many of the safety issues with which I am concerned, including a provision to collect statistics for non-traffic accidents.□ Additionally, I wanted to mention that a number of contributing factors to non-traffic-related car accidents are addressed in H.R. 2230, the Cameron Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act, which I have introduced with Representative Peter King again this Congress.□□ I believe that by simply requiring safer power window switches, better rear visibility, and a reminder system that lets drivers know if passengers remain in the vehicle, our bill would protect our most valuable cargo."□