

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 4, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

The 1950's and early 1960's were marked by enormous growth in the Nation's highway systems -- the number of vehicles which used them and the miles which they traveled nearly doubled. We developed a modern, flexible form of transportation. It was also deadly. Deaths rose from 34,700 in 1950 to top 53,000 in 1966, when the Congress determined that a national effort was needed to contain the runaway slaughter and passed the Highway Safety and National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Acts. The attached reports, which I am transmitting in accordance with the reporting requirements in those acts, describe the various traffic safety programs, with emphasis on activities during 1973.

Without question, the seven-year-old national traffic safety effort has proved beneficial. As will be seen by figure 1 in the motor vehicle safety report, annual deaths among passenger car occupants, which were rising throughout the early 60's, have since leveled off and remained fairly constant in face of a rise through 1972 in traffic deaths. This is in spite of large increases in mileage driven, number of vehicles, drivers, average speed, and alcohol consumption -- to name some of the factors which we know contribute to highway accidents. The overall growth in traffic fatalities is attributable to motorcycle, pedestrian, and bicycle accidents. There is little doubt that our motor vehicle safety standards are saving lives and reducing the severity of injuries.

Improvements in the Nation's highways are also making a major contribution to progress in traffic safety. Since 1967 the death rate per 100 million miles traveled has declined steadily on our modernized roadways.

Although total traffic fatalities remain shockingly high, the fatality rate has declined from 5.5 per 100 million vehicle miles to 4.3 -- a significant decrease of 22 percent since 1967. Had the 1967 fatality rate continued, almost 72,000 Americans would have been killed in highway accidents in 1973, instead of the estimated total of just over 56,000. This estimated saving of 16,000 lives in a single year represents an enormous financial saving to society in terms of wages, medical costs, legal expenses, and property damage, not to mention human suffering. Such savings would not have come about without the combined efforts of Federal, State, and local officials involved in this national emphasis, as well as private citizens who have supported the program.

In 1973, the lowering of speed limits and other effects of the energy shortage situation had a dramatic impact on highway fatality statistics. During the last two months of the year, as States reduced their speed limits and motorists voluntarily limited their driving, the number of fatalities

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declined by as much as 25 percent below the November/December 1972 totals in some States. As a result, the Nation as a whole ended the year having lost 2,000 fewer lives than had been projected.

The saving in lives during the past year provides an added incentive for the Government and the Nation to persist in the endeavor to make our vehicles, our highways, and our drivers safer. I am confident that well-managed programs and well-managed use of our resources will continue to have a positive effect in improved highway safety.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,
September 4, 1974

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