

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

PROGRESS REPORT

VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 2

MARCH/APRIL 1999

FOUNDATION SETS RESEARCH PRIORITIES

At its annual meeting in Fort Lauderdale, the AAA Foundation's Research and Development Committee approved funding for six new research projects in 1999. These included:

An Assessment of the Role of Driver Inattention in Traffic Crashes. The most recent in-depth investigation of this subject was performed in the mid 1970s and found that driver inattention contributed to 56 percent of the crashes investigated. Since that time vehicles have become equipped with many new potential distractions, yet their contribution to crashes has not been adequately assessed. This research will be conducted over three years and will be the largest research project the Foundation has ever funded.

A Study of Headlight Glare Countermeasures. Glare from other cars' headlights appears to be a growing motorist concern. Many vehicles, such as pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles, have higher than normal headlights, and other cars have daytime running lights and high-intensity discharge headlights. Research will assess countermeasures to nighttime glare, such as special mirrors and glasses and techniques for readjusting unusually bright or high-mounted headlights.

An Assessment of the State of the Art in Truck Splash and Spray Suppression. Despite the increasing use of more aerodynamic trucks, which should reduce road spray, motorists continue to experience visibility problems in wet weather because of spray from large trucks. A federal rulemaking on this subject was terminated in 1988 and little is known about what kinds of new devices may have been developed to deal with this problem since that time. Thus, there is a need for this review to determine what is available, what has been done, and what is being investigated.

An Assessment of the Demand for Traffic Safety Education Materials. This project was developed from a proposal submitted to the Committee by the California State Automobile Association and will determine what traffic safety

education materials are most useful to educators at different levels of schooling. Results from this research will be useful to AAA, CAA, individual clubs, and others in guiding the development of new traffic safety education programs and materials for use by elementary and middle school teachers.

Establishment of a R&D Technical Advisory Group. As the Foundation's program of research grows in scope and sophistication, so too does its need for new sources of research expertise beyond that held by the Foundation's staff. The Committee allocated new funds to retain outside experts, who will assist the staff in designing complicated new research projects, evaluating research proposals, and providing a peer review of finished research.

Co-Funding of an Updated Study of Older Driver Safety Performance and Needs, with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The Committee approved this cooperative venture to update the Transportation Research Board's groundbreaking 1988 report, *Transportation in an Aging Society: Improving Mobility and Safety for Older Persons (Special report 218)*. The Foundation was actively involved in supporting research that went into the original report and its involvement in this update continues to demonstrate the AAA and CAA communities' commitment to helping older persons drive safely for as long as possible.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has made a grant to the Beverly Foundation, Pasadena, California, to conduct a series of focus group interviews with older drivers and their caregivers as part of the research and educational initiative coordinated by NHTSA. In addition to upgrading the Transportation Research Board's report, the project includes a series of research



Marguerite D. Hambleton, Ph.D., President/CEO of AAA West Penn/West Virginia, discusses Foundation research with Robert Rugel, Vice Chairman of AAA Mid-Atlantic.

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fora and focus groups throughout the United States and an international symposium on older driver issues. The project will culminate in a new national research agenda and related public policy recommendations concerning older driver safety and mobility issues. The Foundation has also made a grant to the Eno Foundation for Transportation, Inc., to partially support its work to synthesize the findings from the research fora; additional financial support for this synthesis is being provided by NHTSA.

Members of the R&D Committee decided which projects should be funded. From left: Don Patton, Vice President, Publishing and Safety, California State Automobile Association; Stephen Lenzi, Vice President of Public Affairs, Auto Club of Southern California; and James Kolstad, Senior Vice President of Public and Government Relations for AAA.

CONTRACTS AWARDED FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has awarded contracts for the following projects:

Adult driver-ZED: Electronic Learning Facilitators, Inc., of Bethesda, MD has been awarded a contract to develop a version of the Foundation's driver-ZED risk management software for adult drivers. The present configuration is specifically aimed at new teen drivers, but the program was designed in modules so that this modification would be possible. The adult version of the program will be targeted at the corporate training market. Release of the new program is scheduled for the third quarter of 1999.

Safety Data of Longer Combination Vehicles: Data Nexus, Inc., of College Station, TX, has been awarded a contract to evaluate the adequacy of data collection and analysis procedures for crashes involving longer combination vehicles, such as truck tractors pulling three trailers and "Rocky Mountain doubles" trailers. The study is scheduled to be completed in November of 1999.

Cost-Effectiveness of Testing DWI Offenders: A contract has been awarded to the Behavioral Health Research Center of the Southwest, Albuquerque, NM, to conduct a meta-analysis of research on the cost-effectiveness of testing DWI offenders for alcoholism. The year-long study is scheduled for completion in March, 2000.

DAIMLER-CHRYSLER SAYS, "DO THE BUCKLE."

It's the latest MTV-style music video: "Do the Buckle," from DaimlerChrysler, and you can catch it on any of the company's fleet of minivans. The "Do the Buckle" minivans have already traveled more than 200,000 miles and visited 1,200 locations across the United States, spreading a musical message that, to baby boomers at least, sounds a lot like "Do the Hustle."

The minivans present the importance of vehicle restraint systems through interactive displays, hands-on exhibits, and the "Do the Buckle" video. It all adds up to what's cool: wearing safety belts. The video features Bucky, an animated character who inspires kids to wear belts, along with a guest appearance by Disney star Bill Nye the Science Guy.

"Every hour, someone dies in America simply because they didn't wear a safety belt," said Robert J. Eaton, Chairman of DaimlerChrysler. "Safety belts are the most effective means of reducing fatalities and serious injuries, and sadly, many Americans aren't using them. We work hard to build safe cars, trucks, and minivans, but even the beset safety devices will not work if they are not used correctly."

To learn more about "Do the Buckle," or to schedule an appearance by one of the safety minivans, call 877-TOBUCKY.

Progress Report is issued every other month by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, a not-for-profit, publicly-supported charitable educational and research organization. Visit our web site at <http://www.aafts.org>

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MAKING MASSACHUSETTS SAFER

"Our club has been distributing Foundation videos and brochures at no charge to local police departments and school systems," explains John Paul, Manager of Traffic Safety for AAA Southern New England. "For years we've been saying, 'we're here to help you with whatever materials we have, and we'll make them as available as possible.'" The club gives away "several hundred" videos a year, according to Paul. "Additionally, we have donated a copy of the adult crossing guard video in the city of Worcester, which is the second-largest city in Massachusetts. We have a lending library too, but somebody may say 'Can I borrow that video' because they have a one-time use for it, but if they own it they'll tend to use it more often."

For example, a safety organization called "Keeping Cape Cod Alive" has used all the AAA Foundation videos. "They do a lot of presentations to different groups," Paul says. "They've used the road rage video, and they do events with older drivers so they've used 'The Older and Wiser Driver' and the older driver's self test, as well as the brochures. They've also used the general traffic safety videos, everything from 'Getting Past the Orange Barrels' to 'Managing Space and Time.'"

Paul works closely with another group, the Massachusetts Safety Officers League. "They're a

dedicated group," Paul says. "They spend the majority of their time in schools and talking to civic organizations." Like many police safety departments, the organization works on a tight budget and AAA Southern New England provides officers with materials for presentations. "Their sole purpose is to dedicate themselves to keeping the roads safe, mostly through education. They go into schools and driver's education classes; everything from pre-school to colleges." Presentations cover a full range, including bicycle and pedestrian safety. The demand is often seasonal, Paul says: "This time of year they want 'Just Another Saturday Night,' because it's timely for prom season."

At a recent Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Vendor Fair, Paul distributed AAA Foundation traffic safety materials and videos to law enforcement officials from around the state. "It was a little tough being next to the guy selling the bullet-proof vests," he says. "But we have a small traffic safety staff. We can't be everywhere, so if we give the AAA materials out we're still getting the AAA goodwill and the police department is working with us to make the state safer."



AAA Southern New England presented specially printed "Preventing Road Rage" brochures to the Massachusetts state police. From left, John Paul, Manager of Traffic Safety for AAA Southern New England, Col. Reed Hillman of the Massachusetts State Police, and Art Kinsman, Director of Government Relations for AAA Southern New England.

IS YOUR PROGRAM WORKING? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Traffic safety isn't an exact science — not even close. This can make it difficult to tell if a safety program is actually doing any good, and hard to convince funders of a program's value.

The key to evaluating a community traffic safety program is figuring out what you want to measure, says Dr. Lindsay Griffin of the Texas Transportation Institute, who spoke at the 17th Lifesavers convention in Seattle last month. "Evaluation needs to take place on three levels," Dr. Griffin suggests. "The first thing is to know what your objectives are." The objectives should be specific, measurable, and limited; people often

design programs without knowing precisely what they want to achieve.

"Objectives occur at different levels," Dr. Griffin says. "The first is process, or what are we going to do." Process can be anything from producing materials to holding safety events to placing radio public service announcements.

"The next level is impact." Impact can take many forms, but amounts to what changes the program has produced: "It may be increased knowledge or wider use of safety helmets," Dr. Griffin explains. "At the third level we have the outcome in reduced deaths and injuries."

Many programs make the mistake of focusing only on the outcome level, Dr. Griffin explains. "In most communities, crash numbers, fortunately, are small. With relatively few crashes, we may

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SAFETY PROGRAMS (continued)

not have enough statistical power to demonstrate what might be a bona fide effect." In other words, crashes occur in relatively small numbers, so a program may not be able to show a statistically significant benefit.

A safety program's best bet is to measure what it's trying to do, Griffin suggests. "To the extent that they have projects intended to impact learning or seat belt usage, they should be measuring the effectiveness in those terms." In other words, take a survey or do a seat belt observational study to see if people are actually changing their behavior.

Safety activists can then look to published research to show that their program works, Griffin says. "If we know that better knowledge reduces crashes, and we can show that our program has

improved knowledge, then we can infer that we've had that kind of effect."

AAA NEWS NOW JUST A CLICK AWAY

The national office of AAA has opened the "AAA Newsroom," a new web page for the media and others who want to know more about the national AAA. Just click on www.aaa.com/news for the latest on gasoline prices, car maintenance, travel news, and road construction. There's also tips on buying a new car and a self-administered "Name that car!" quiz for old car buffs. The site contains information about AAA traffic safety activities and also links to the AAA Foundation's home page.

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