

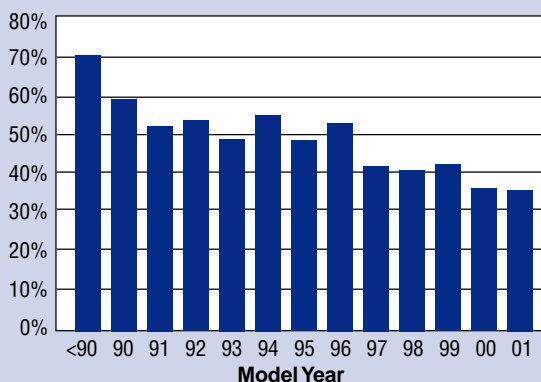
# PROGRESS REPORT

## MORE RADIO BUTTONS, MORE CRASHES?

Are radios getting more complicated? A survey on the AAA Foundation's web page suggests they are. For two weeks in late November the AAA Foundation's web site asked visitors to record the model year of their car and the number of buttons on the radio. 1,809 visitors responded, giving car ages that ranged from "pre-1990" to "model year 2001." A graph of the data showed a clear upward trend: 70 percent of vehicles manufactured before 1990 had fewer than 11 buttons to control the sound system, while 65 percent of cars from the model year 2001 had more than 11 buttons. "This isn't exactly scientific," admits David Willis, the AAA Foundation's president. "But driver distraction is an important cause of crashes, and one of the biggest distractions is tuning the radio. This survey suggests that radios are getting more complicated, which means drivers must take more attention away from the road in order to pick their stations."

Tuning the radio is only one of many possible distractions, of course. A more detailed and rigorous study that uses crash reports and recorded observations of driver behavior is currently under way at the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center. This study is expected to be completed late in 2001.

**Car Radios With Fewer Than 11 Buttons**  
N = 1,809



## MEET SHILPA

Shilpa Balikai, a senior at the George Washington University, has been working with the AAA Foundation this year as a co-op student. Ms Balikai was born in India, but her family left when she was a small child. She spent time in England and Saudi Arabia before moving to the United States a few years ago.

As a psychology major, Shilpa has a strong interest in human behavior, including that of drivers, but she also enjoys taking courses in art. After graduation she intends to go to medical school, where she would like to specialize in treatment of the terminally ill. "But I'll probably go back and forth between that and pediatrics before finally deciding," she says.

Shilpa says she's enjoying her 16 hours a week at the Foundation. "I've definitely been exposed to things I wouldn't have seen if I'd pursued something in my major," she says. "This is my first 'real' job, as opposed to filing or answering phones, and it has more of a sense of responsibility. I've learned a lot about statistics and communicating, and also about internet searches."

At the Foundation, Shilpa has been assisting with research and with data management, as well as analyzing media coverage and writing a story for this issue of *Progress Report*. "This job is definitely my first step as an adult and already I've changed in terms of work habits," she says. "I hope that by the time I graduate I'll be a little more ready for the world than I am right now."



*Shilpa Balikai is working at the Foundation as a co-op student.*

## EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Now you can keep up with the latest traffic safety news by visiting the AAA Foundation's web site and checking the center column. Every day the site offers a selection of news stories about traffic safety, taken from national, international, and regional print media sources.

—continued next page

## INSIDE:

- Fast, Fast, Faster Web Links and E-mail* 2
- Banner Ads Tell Night Owls to "Wake Up!"* 2
- "Designated Drivers" May Still be Drinking* 3
- To Change Perception of Trucks, Change Treatment of Truck Drivers, David Willis Says* 3

## READ ALL ABOUT IT! (continued)

"We want to be the premier site for traffic safety information," says David Willis, the AAA Foundation's president. "These targeted stories will help people in the traffic safety field keep up with the latest issues and follow current developments." New stories are added to the site every weekday, while an archive will keep previous stories for 30 days.

Fortunately for the Foundation staff, the process of posting the new daily content is largely automated. The original news items are provided by Screaming Media, a Web company that specializes in delivering content to web sites; the stories are from mainstream press outlets that include most, but not all, major newspapers and magazines. Screaming Media's automated content filter sorts through the day's news feed and gives the AAA Foundation staff a selection of safety-related stories to

choose from. All the staff member has to do is select that day's stories for posting, click a button, and watch the stories load automatically.

To view traffic safety news, go to <http://www.aaafoundation.org> and check out the center column.

## FAST, FAST, FASTER WEB LINKS AND E-MAIL

Foundation staff are doing more internet research in less time, thanks to the Foundation's new DSL (digital subscriber line) installation. The DSL allows transfer speeds of up to 1.4 MB per second, virtually eliminating the "World Wide Wait" while web pages take time to load. While the new technology won't speed web access for people coming to the Foundation's home page, it does make it easier for the office staff to answer e-mail and do research. Plans are in the works to redesign the Foundation's home page at <http://www.aaafoundation.org> and to improve the interface for users who log on at all speeds.

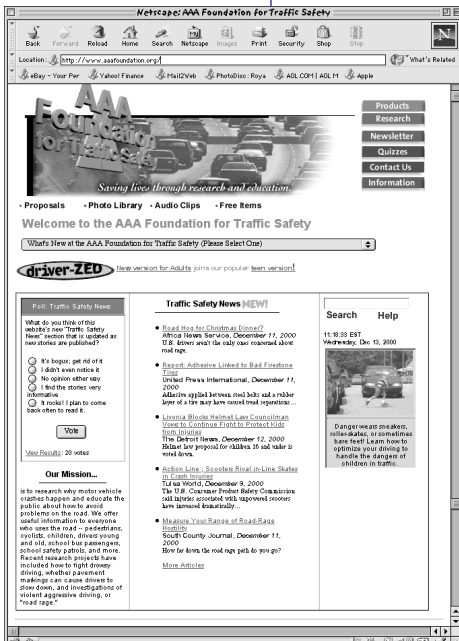
## BANNER ADS TELL NIGHT OWLS TO "WAKE UP!"

Late-night web surfers are learning about the dangers of drowsy driving — if they visit one of the web sites chosen for the AAA Foundation's latest Internet-age program to teach drivers about the dangers of falling asleep at the wheel.

A recent AAA Foundation study examined drowsy driving crashes and found that there were several situations that contributed to the likelihood that a driver would have a drowsy driving crash: The drivers had been awake for more than 20 hours, drove between midnight and 6 a.m., worked more than one job, worked a night shift, and slept less than six hours the night before the crash. Drowsy drivers were also more likely to be male and to be in their early 20s.

DoubleClick.net, an internet advertising company, has placed the web banners on a variety of entertainment sites that are designed to appeal to young adults. But if you're a geezer who wakes up at dawn and goes to bed early, don't expect to see them even if you go to the right web sites: The banners are only being shown between the hours of midnight and 7 a.m. (The AAA Foundation's own web site has also been running the banners, if you'd like to see them during daylight hours.)

"We know the risk factors associated with drowsy driving," says David Willis. "Putting lively, eye-catching banners on appropriate web sites allows us to reach the people who are most



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likely to have a drowsy driving crash.” The banners include a click-through button that takes users to a special page on the AAA Foundation web site with more information and a chance to take the “Wake Up!” quiz.

## **“DESIGNATED DRIVERS” MAY STILL BE DRINKING**

When college students go out on the town, they’re likely to designate a driver who will remain sober. But that driver doesn’t always refrain from drinking, and having a designated driver may allow passengers to drink more than they otherwise would have, a study found

Researchers William DeJong and Jay A. Winsten surveyed 17,592 students at 140 U.S. colleges and universities to find out about the students’ drinking habits. Overall, 37% of the students who had consumed alcohol in the past year said they rode with a designated driver in the past month. But having a driver who was safe meant these students were likely to drink more than they otherwise might have: 22% claimed that although they did not normally engage in binge drinking, they had done so when there was a designated driver. (Binge drinking is defined as having five drinks in a row for males or four drinks in a row for females.)

What’s more, while the passengers who ride with a designated driver may tend to engage in heavier drinking because they feel they will get home safely, the designated drivers themselves do not always abstain from alcohol. Twelve percent of the students classified as “drinkers” in the study admitted to drinking five or more beers when they themselves were the designated driver, and five percent of habitual binge drinkers said they continued to binge drink when they were the designated driver. Although these percentages may seem relatively small compared to the total number of drivers, they do represent students who have had a significant amount to drink. Moreover, 23 percent of designated drivers said that they had one drink, which means that in total about 40 percent of all designated drivers have been drinking.

College students widely use the designated driver system to avoid driving while they are inebriated, and if properly used the system does prevent alcohol-related crashes. However, the

**When you're ready for bed...  
stop driving!** <http://www.aaafoundation.org>



consistency with which the designated driver strategy is applied and the seriousness with which students take the role leave much to be desired. Combining the idea of designating a driver with emphasis on the importance of remaining sober would be key steps in making the roads safer for motorists.

- Shilpa Balikai

## **TO CHANGE PERCEPTION OF TRUCKS, CHANGE TREATMENT OF TRUCK DRIVERS, DAVID WILLIS SAYS**

*The following is condensed from a speech to the Society of Automotive Engineers, December 4, 2000, by David Willis, President of the AAA Foundation:*

Good afternoon! I’ve been asked to present the “Public’s Perception on Truck Safety.” After hearing anti-big-truck diatribes from many quarters, it would be too easy for me to say that motorists hate big trucks. But that overstates the case. Most truck haters realize, as ATA used to say, that “If you got it, a truck brought it.” They admire a skillfully handled big rig, adhering to the speed limit, with a truly professional driver. And many still recall the now-diminished number of “knights of the road” who, in earlier, simpler times, were willing to help distressed motorists.

Still, the overwhelming perception today is that there are too many trucks, driven too fast, by too many unprofessional drivers.

So what’s to be done to change these perceptions? Perhaps what really needs to change is some of the underlying realities.

During the two decades since the economic deregulation of the trucking industry in 1980, the business has evolved into one of the most openly competitive industries in America. While free competition has been good for the economy, it

—continued next page

**“...the overwhelming perception today is that there are too many trucks, driven too fast, by too many unprofessional drivers.”**

## **TRUCKS AND DRIVERS** (continued)

has not, by and large, been good for those who most influence the public's perception of truck safety — truck drivers.

In this new economy, more and more demands are being placed on the non-union truck drivers: Just-in-time deliveries, even if that means violating the Federal hours of service rules. Pay by the mile, which means non-driving time has no value – except to the driver himself – and drivers wait for dispatch, loading, and unloading at their own expense. Weeks away from home sleeping in the back of a truck – one that is often on the road as the use of team drivers grows. Shipper demands that drivers help load and unload freight, even in violation of contracts and Federal rules. Intense competition for places to stop and sleep, as states shut down public rest areas for fear of crime or lack of money. Disrespectful dispatchers and shippers and receivers who won't even let drivers use their restrooms.

Is it any wonder that these realities produce frustrated, fatigued, unhappy, even angry truck drivers? Why are we surprised when this frustration and anger erupts in bad behavior on the highway, bad behavior that poisons the public's perception of trucking safety.

An important first step in changing the public's negative perceptions of truck safety would be to alter the reality of truck driving. These changes should include:

- Automate enforcement of the hours-of-service rules through mandatory on-board recorders. This would combat just-in-time abuses if combined with stepped-up enforcement.
- Revoke the Fair Labor Standards Act exemption for truck drivers so a driver's time would become of value. If drivers were compensated for the hundreds of unpaid hours they spend waiting for dispatch or loading, the industry would be compelled to find ways to avoid wasting that now-valuable time.
- Provide more and safer places for truckers to stop and sleep. The current shortage of safe public rest areas encourages hours of service violations and leads to sleep-related crashes.
- Better treatment for drivers. In too many cases, the life of an over-the-road, non-unionized driver is anything but that fitting a prospective "knight of the road."

Human capital is just that – human beings who need to be treated as such. Treat a man like a beast, and he'll behave like one.

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