

Progress Report

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**AAA
Foundation
for Traffic Safety**

*Saving Lives through
Research and Education*

Research Initiatives for 2001

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety decided on four major research initiatives for this year. The research projects include:

Seated for Safety

Recent research has revealed that as many as 80 to 90 percent of children are not properly restrained when they are riding in motor vehicles. Although the fatality risk for all crash types is almost 40 percent lower for children seated in the back, another recent study found that far too many small children continue to ride in the front seat. The proposed research will examine materials designed to educate parents and other adult caregivers who transport children under 12. The study will evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of these materials and the effectiveness of their distribution. Particular attention will be paid to materials that target high-risk populations, such as minorities, recent immigrants, non-English speakers, low-income families, caretakers with low literacy, and parents of children with special health care needs.

Vehicle-related road debris

Objects lying in the road can cause serious crashes, injuries, and deaths. Road debris comes from a variety of

sources. Equipment can break loose from vehicles, objects being transported may fall out of truck beds or off the roofs of cars, and tire treads may separate, placing debris on the roads.

—continued on page 2

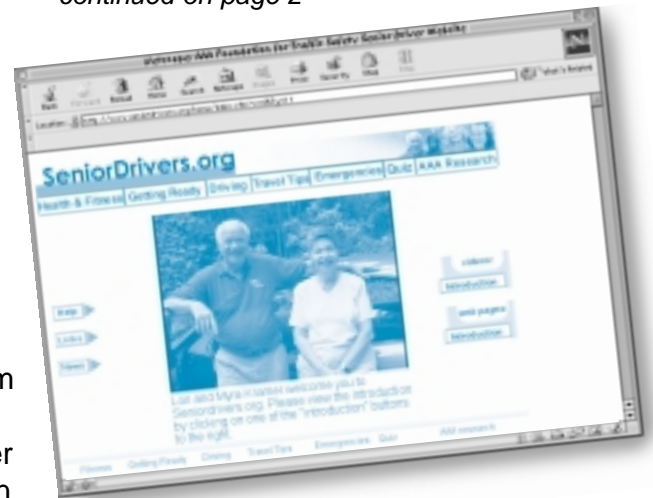
New Senior Drivers Site

As the baby-boom generation ages, so will the number of older drivers on the road. And while most people can safely continue driving after they reach 55, the inevitable physical changes of aging can affect their ability to spot danger and drive safely. What's more, older drivers may have learned their skills decades ago and not have kept up with evolving laws and today's traffic situations.

A new AAA Foundation website, <http://www.seniordrivers.org>, helps older drivers who want to keep their skills up to date. The website aims to help older drivers to stay safely behind the wheel for as many years as possible, but the information it provides can be useful for drivers of any age.

The site includes a broad range of information in several formats, including

—continued on page 3



Inside:

Do Kids Drive Like Dad? **2**

Safety Mirrors For Parents **4**

Aggressive Driving in Young Drivers **5**

Pool Asks What Distracted Drivers Do **5**

New Look for Website **6**

Do Kids Drive Like Dad?

Teen driver crash rates reflect their parents'

"Like father, like son." "Like mother, like daughter." Research shows that this is true of driving styles as well as everything else. We know that young drivers are more likely to be in motor vehicle crashes than any other age

group. But some young people seem more likely than others to crash, and it may be possible to identify these youngsters in advance by looking at their parents' driving records.

A study conducted by researchers from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the University of North Carolina, and Westar, Inc., identified 155,000 teenaged children in more than 141,000 families and compared crash and violation records of the teens with

Research Initiatives

(continued from page 1)

Objects ranging from blown tires and tire treads to drive shafts, bumpers, hoods, leaf springs, brake parts, and dislodged cargo have all contributed to serious crashes. At highway speeds even a relatively small object such as a hand tool, spare tire, tarpaulin, or tie-down strap can be deadly. This study will look at the sources of road debris and the effects of road debris on traffic safety. Researchers will identify local programs to eliminate road debris and will identify ways to reduce incidents of dangerous objects on the nation's roadways.

Enforcement of traffic laws on large trucks

In the United States in 1999 there were 5,362 fatalities and 142,000 injuries involving large trucks. Yet only 14 percent of these fatalities were to occupants of the trucks themselves. Occupants of other motor vehicles accounted for 78 percent of the fatalities, while non-occupants such as pedestrians and bicyclists accounted for the remaining 8 percent. Despite these statistics, police do not pull over trucks that violate the traffic laws as often as they stop automobiles. This study will interview police officers and ask how they decide whether to pull over a large

truck that is exceeding the speed limit as compared with what factors cause them to pull over a speeding passenger vehicle. It is important to know directly from police officers themselves what factors prevent them from enforcing traffic regulations against large trucks.

Supplemental Transportation Program for Seniors

In 1999 a national study by the Beverly Foundation and the AAA Foundation determined that when seniors stop driving they often cannot walk to a bus stop, access a bus, get into a van, get to a physician's office without an escort, or afford a taxi, even when these options are available. The study found that communities throughout the country are organizing supplemental transportation programs for seniors to augment existing transportation with new services. The present project intends to expand the use of senior transportation programs by offering demonstration mentoring, network linking, and technical support. The Beverly Foundation and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety have recognized certain programs with "Star Search Awards." These programs can act as mentors to new transportation efforts and help them incorporate the most effective strategies for helping seniors get around.

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their parents. There was a clear correlation between the two generations when it came to driving styles.

The report states, "In both single and two-parent households, parents' driving records were predictive of their children's records." Children whose parents had a high crash rate had higher crash rates themselves, while children whose parents had multiple traffic violations were more likely to have violations. In addition, the study reports, "Sons had higher crash and violation rates than daughters . . . and were twice as likely as daughters to have received at least one violation."

With the spread of graduated driver licensing, parents today have a more prominent role in teaching their children to drive than the previous generation. Today's graduated systems phase in full-privilege driving in three stages - learner's permit, an intermediate stage with limited driving privileges, and full licensing. In the first and second stages, teens are likely to do much of their driving with a parent sitting beside them and teaching them what to do.

What parents may not realize is that they can also influence their children's driving through family interactions and by reforming their own driv-

ing habits. It is not clear how much of the driving similarity is caused by genetics, which determine several key personality traits, or by environment, in which the child has spent years watching the parent drive in a particular way. But whether it's nature or nurture, the child's driving resembles the parents'.

The findings raise the concern that some parents may not be suitable driving teachers or supervisors for their

—continued on page 4

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Senior Driver Site

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streaming video that shows safety information in movie form. "Since it's easier to understand something if you see it done, we've offered users that option," says Jack Hoch, the AAA Foundation's Webmaster. "The site automatically detects what kind of technology users have and offers the appropriate files. People with slower connections will be shown a version of the site that uses nonmoving pictures to give the same information."

Seniordrivers.org has two genial senior driver hosts, Lon and Myra Kramer, who introduce the site and model the safety strategies for the viewer. In videos and still photographs, they and other seniors illustrate safe ways to cope with common traffic problems and difficult driving situations. There's also a section on physical fitness for drivers, which offers video of exercises that help site visitors maintain the strength and flexibility required for safe driving.

Other topics range from an overview of the rules of the road to a section that explains traffic signs and signals. There's a page giving the emergency telephone numbers in each state, including special cell phone numbers, along with a quiz about sleep that shows site visitors how they can avoid getting into a drowsy-driving crash. For grandparents, the site shows instructions on how to select a baby seat by allowing for the age and weight of a child, as well as how to select a seat that fits both the child and the vehicle.

"As the population ages it becomes increasingly important to get this information to them," Hoch says. "Our senior drivers website offers a high-tech way to do that."

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**AAA
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Saving lives through research and education

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children. However, other factors come into play, particularly the fact that parents are usually highly motivated to protect their children from harm.

What the report makes clear is that parents need to be informed about the effect their own behavior can have on their children's driving. Local highway safety authorities can help by preparing and distributing appropriate educational materials to help the parents teach safe driving. The study's authors suggest that parents "need to be mindful that they are role models for their children and they should expect that their driving habits, both good and bad, will be emulated."

Safety Mirrors For Parents

A close shave caused Barbara Spangler from Newark, Ohio, to think twice about distractions. After she turned around to check on a crying child in the back she found herself only inches from a dump truck, which had stopped abruptly in front of her.

This started Ms. Spangler thinking about the natural instinct mothers have to respond to the cry of their child, an instinct that, she says, "can be a disaster waiting to happen even during a routine trip to the store."

Spangler found that a quarter of the 6.3 million crashes that happen in the US each year are caused by driver distraction or inattention, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and that car crashes are the leading cause of death for children.

Her near-miss led Spangler to design a mirror that would give her a better view of her children than the standard-issue rearview mirror. "I tried a variety of other mirrors designed for use with infants, but they either fell off my windshield or had a distorted or obstructive view." So spangler designed the

Reflections Safety mirror, which attaches to the stem of a rear-view mirror and shows the entire back seat. Spangler says, "An added bonus is that they behave better because they know I can see them!"

Other companies have developed mirror systems that add to or replace an ordinary rearview mirror with a large convex mirror that shows the entire area behind the car as well as the back seat. The Lanechanger fits over an existing mirror, while the Lanechanger Plus and Lanechanger III replace the regular mirror. All versions of the Lanechanger claim to eliminate blind spots and allow drivers to see children in the back seat.

For those who prefer a higher-tech, higher-cost solution to the problem of turning around to look at babies in the back, there's the VideoMirror with Babyvue. This system uses a small video camera and a 2.5" video display that attaches to the rear-view mirror. The camera points at the baby and the driver only has to look up at the video display to see if everything's all right in the back. As the kids grow up the system can be expanded to show the entire back seat. For childless drivers, the camera can be aimed out the back window; the driver looks at the video display before backing up to see if there's anything behind the vehicle.

Find out more about these rear-seat vision products on the web. Reflections Safety Mirrors can be found at <http://www.ReflectionsSafetyMirrors.com>. The various Lanechanger models are available from <http://www.lanechanger.com/>, as well as a number of other



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—continued on page 5

online vendors. VideoMirror with BabyVue is available from Donnelly, <http://www.donnelly.com>; click on “ShopDonnelly.”

Aggressive Driving in Young Drivers

By Crystal Barksdale

According to a recent study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “the youngest motorists (ages 16-20) reported the highest levels of driving through stop signs without slowing, weaving back and forth between lanes, tailgating, driving through red lights, making an angry/obscene gesture or comment, and cutting off another car.” Young motorists report aggressive driving behaviors at a much higher rate than other licensed drivers. For example, 18 percent reported driving through stop signs without slowing down in the past year, compared with 31 percent of respondents 65 and older. Table 1 shows a strong linear decline in reported aggressive driving behaviors by age.

While the problem of aggressive driving is being attacked by local, state, and national organizations through media campaigns and widespread education programs. But young drivers are not specifically targeted by these aggressive driving programs, which could explain why their reported rate of aggressive driving is so high. Perhaps young drivers do not understand the danger of aggressive driving, or do not care.

Whatever the reason, if such a large percentage of young drivers report these behaviors, imagine how many are actually committing them.

Table 1— Reported Aggressive Driving Behaviors In the Past Year by Age Group

	16-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Driving through stop signs w/o slowing (N= 3,044)	81%	71%	61%	50%	44%	40%	31%
Switching between lanes (N= 1,467)	63%	60%	45%	29%	24%	16%	8%
Tailgating (N= 2,956)	44%	37%	30%	30%	23%	15%	6%
Driving through red lights (N= 2,956)	44%	33%	28%	21%	19%	20%	12%
Making angry/obscene gestures (N= 3,044)	37%	39%	31%	18%	13%	13%	6%
Cutting another car off (N= 3,044)	39%	40%	24%	16%	10%	9%	7%

These data indicate that many young drivers behave aggressively behind the wheel.

Young people need to be fully educated about every aspect of safe driving practices and laws when they begin to drive. With the increasing use of graduated driver licensing programs to reduce high crash rates among teens, it is vital to remember the role aggressive driving plays in the equation.

Crystal Barksdale is a senior at the University of North Carolina, majoring in psychology. She joined the Foundation last summer as a research associate.

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Poll Asks What Distracted Drivers Do

A recently released poll by the Response Insurance company asked more than 1,000 drivers about their driving habits, including what distracting activities they perform behind the wheel. The most common were tuning the radio, 62%; eating, 57%; turning

head around to speak, 56%, and reaching for something, 44%. A third (32%) said they read and/or write while driving, while 29% said they talk on a cell phone.

When asked which activities had caused or nearly caused a crash, however, the answers were very different: 26% said they had nearly had a crash from spilling coffee and 26% from breaking up a fight between their children. Other contributors to crashes or near misses included wiping off cigarette ashes, 22%, and racing with another car, reaching for something, or using a computer, all with 21%. An alarming 20% said they were distracted by drinking alcohol.

Unfortunately, as the comic strip character Pogo once observed, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” When asked what they feared most about other drivers, 83% of respondents answered that they feared the drivers were “not paying attention.”

New Look for Website

The AAA Foundation’s website has a new look — and a new structure. We’ve not only updated the appearance, but we’ve reorganized materials so they’re more systematic and easier to find.

Check out the new look at <http://www.aaafoundation.org> and let us know what you think — write to the Webmaster if you run across any broken links or problems, and also if you like the new arrangement!

