National Center for Statistics and Analysis of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Traffic Safety Information Systems News

The NHTSA Traffic Records Team
Traffic Safety Information Systems Newsletter

Inside This Issue:

A Backwards Leap in Realizing the Value of Crash Data

Based on the article, "Officers' Time at Crash Sites Charged to Drivers, Insurers," John Seewer, Associated Press. Saturday, October, 8, 2005.

In the midst of the struggle to emphasize the importance of quality traffic safety data, some police departments in Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana have begun charging drivers and their insurers with the cost of investigating traffic crashes, citing that the information is "useful only to the insurance companies." Desperate for more funds, these police departments are searching for new sources of money, and taking aim at drivers who cause traffic crashes. Depending on the city, the potential bill to an at-fault driver can range anywhere from $120 to $500. Police officials cite that they are spending more time on gathering detailed information on crashes, including vehicle damage and airbag usage, which police agencies "don't have any use for."

In a speech given by Dr. Jeffrey Rungy at the 2003 Traffic Records Forum, it was stated that improving data was (and still is) among the top priorities of NHTSA. The realization of the importance of quality data is not only vital to the users of the data, but to those in the field who collect it. Without the cooperation of data collectors, NHTSA can never attain its goal of having timely, accurate, complete, integrated, uniform, and accessible data. Without this key element, making good decisions based on good data to help prevent traffic crashes and saving lives is impossible.

We would appreciate your help in identifying how wide spread this trend is so that we might better develop a program to reduce its possible impact upon a vital part of our safety data systems. If you become aware of such a local initiative to charge drivers for taking crash reports, please provide any information you have to: newsletter@nhtsa-tsis.net. Between now and the Traffic Records Forum we hope to investigate the issue further. Watch for updates in this newsletter and at the www.nhtsa-tsis.net/newsletter site.

*The **Traffic Safety Information Systems Newsletter** is published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Center for Statistics and Analysis, Traffic Records Team, as a resource for the traffic safety data community. The newsletter is published at least quarterly at the NHTSA Traffic Records web site and is also distributed electronically to those that subscribe on line at www.nhtsa-tsis.net/newsletter. Contributions to the newsletter or comments on its content should be sent to newsletter@nhtsa-tsis.net, but must contain contact information for the submitter: name, postal and email address, in order to be considered for publication.*

Outcomes of the Data Impacts of Re-Authorization Conference

December 8-9, 2005

The Transportation Research Board hosted a conference the first week of December, 2005 to address the data impacts of SAFETEA-LU. A team of roughly 30 people from all over the U.S. met for a day and a half to discuss the impacts on safety data, with other teams dealing with freight, transit, and other issues.

The safety team identified over 30 sections in the Bill that had safety data impacts, usually in the form of requiring safety data that could be used to identify problems and countermeasures, manage safety programs and evaluate safety programs at the state and federal level. The safety data team elected to focus on the requirement for each state to develop a comprehensive strategic highway safety plan.

Within the Bill there is language that calls for each state to implement a statewide safety program that addresses traffic safety problems on all roadways and to consider all forms of countermeasures, such as engineering, enforcement, and education. The consensus of the team was that this charge will be a significant challenge to most states and impossible in some.

The assumptions of the safety planning requirements are that traffic safety data (roadway information, traffic crashes, citation data, EMS data) is available for ALL roadways in the state and that the safety planners in the state can apply accepted techniques to identify safety problems (including location) to all roadways in the state. Unfortunately, although most state Departments of Transportation have sophisticated, reliable systems in place to identify high-hazard locations and sections on the state-maintained roadways, the data simply does not exist off-system to support these management systems.

At the same time the team report will reiterate the issue that the ability to have timely, reliable safety that is easily accessible to the safety community will be essential to the ability of states and locals to meet the requirements of the Bill. The Section 408 State Safety Data Improvement Program will provide some structure and incentive to the safety data system planning within the states, but it will not be able to fund all of the system changes that the Bill will require.

ANSI D-20 (2003) Available for Public Viewing

The Forth Edition of ANSI D-20, Data Dictionary of Traffic Records Systems, is now available at the AAMVA website for public view. The purpose of this standard is to set a common set of instructions for data elements related to highway safety, driver licensing, and vehicle registration. Visit the AAMVA website at http://www.aamva.org/standards/stdansid20dictionary.asp to view the revised document.

Traffic Records 101 Classroom Now Available

This January, The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released its web-based training for Traffic Records. To get started with your training:

- Go to http://www.trafficrecords101.net
- Go to “Registration” to set up your account information

Once registered, users are able to study at their own pace, complete interesting reading assignments that include links to applicable websites and articles, take revolving examinations on a wide variety of subjects, and track their progress.

As the field of Traffic Records continues to transform through new technology and information, the curriculum will grow with more advanced courses.

2006 Traffic Records Forum

Call for Presentations

32nd International Forum on Traffic Records and Highway Information Systems

JW Marriott Desert Springs
Palm Desert, California - July 30 – August 3, 2006

As the largest conference in the world of its kind, the Traffic Records Forum brings together professionals who are involved in all aspects of collecting, managing, and using highway safety data. The Traffic Records Program is developed by ATSIP. The Program varies from year to year based on current trends and needs. Generally, you will be able to get information on traffic safety data:

- Usage
- Collection
- Analysis
- Current and Emerging Technology
- Current Systems and Programs
- Research
- Current Issues and Emerging Needs

The Traffic Records Forum is filled with **exhibits, workshops, seminars, and presentations** on topics of interest to the traffic safety data collectors, community, and those that utilize traffic safety data in their field. **Forum Attendees include** state Departments of Transportation, Motor Vehicles, Highway Traffic Safety Offices, Public Safety and Health, state and local law enforcement officials, engineers, Fire and EMS officials, judicial administrators, and highway safety personnel from across the United States and international communities.

Call for Presentations

What we are seeking are training sessions that will give the attendees a better understanding of a topic and allow them to take a working knowledge back to their office. This year we are looking for trainers that would be willing to share their expertise in topic areas rather than on a specific product. Instead of teaching me how to drive a Cadillac, could you teach me how to drive a car and point out what the best features are for me to look for?

For example, instead of an individual training on their electronic crash program, we would like is someone that can share how a crash module should work. What should I look for when I look at crash modules? We all know that MMUCC is here to stay but what do we actually know about MMUCC? Is there someone that can share what impact it has on data? How do we find and interpret the information in the manual?

We are seeking experienced trainers in the following areas:

1. Crash analysis software. How do we use the data that is gathered? What is available to us?
2. GIS Software. What is it, how does it work and how can I apply it?
3. MMUCC. How will the new TEA impact MMUCC requirements? How do we interpret them?
4. XML. What kind of foreign language is it? What will this type of program give me that no other one will?

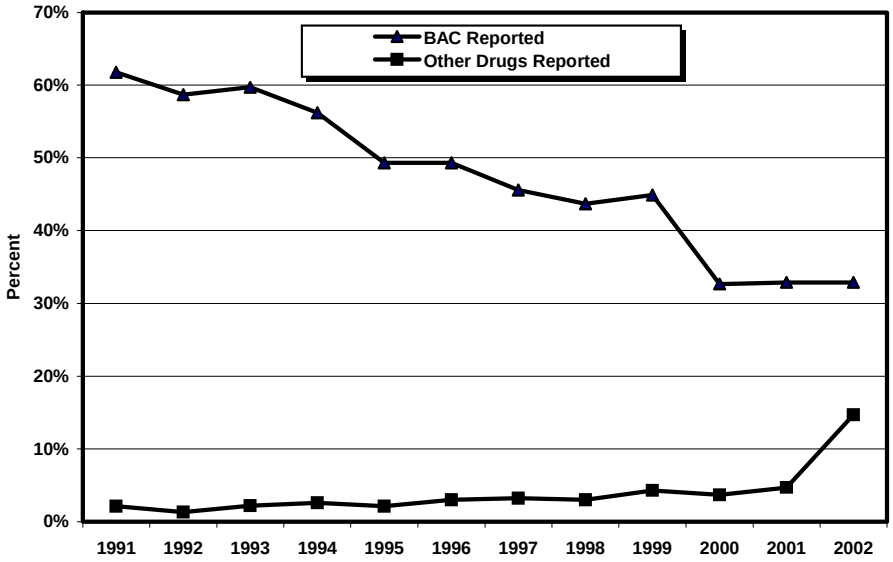
Both documents are available in pdf at http://atsip.org/index.php/2006foruminfo/2006callforpres/.

Alcohol, Drugs and Driving: Improving the Reporting of Toxicology Information for Fatally Injured Drivers and Pedestrians in Texas

Becky T. Davies, Research Scientist
Center for Transportation Safety, Texas Transportation Institute
Project Funded by the Texas Department of Transportation in FY06:

Texas has more alcohol-related traffic fatalities each year than any other state. There were 1,745 persons killed in alcohol-related crashes in Texas in 2002.[1] Texas also has one of the worst records for reporting the alcohol and other drug results to the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS).[2] The rate of reporting the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) for fatally injured drivers in Texas has fallen from 62% in 1991 to 33% in 2002 (see graph). Between 1991 and 2001, less than 5% of the fatally injured drivers in Texas had other drug test results reported in FARS. In 2002, drug test results were reported for only 15% of the drivers killed in crashes in Texas compared with a 43% reporting rate nationally.

Rate of Reporting BACs and Other Drugs for Fatally Injured Drivers in Texas (FARS 1991-2002)



Texas does not have a coordinated system of procedures for all agencies and individuals who are responsible for reporting the toxicology results for traffic fatalities. Consequently, comprehensive data on the incidence of alcohol and other drugs must be collected by contacting individual Medical Examiner (M.E.) Offices across the state in order to obtain missing toxicology results. Past studies have revealed that more than 90% of the fatally injured drivers whose bodies were sent to an M.E. Office were tested for alcohol, and many were tested for other drugs as well.[3,4,5] However, unless the information is requested by the law enforcement officer who investigated the crash, the majority of these test results remain in the M.E. files and they are never documented on the crash reports filed with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and FARS.

Although the new Crash Records Information System (CRIS) developed and maintained by DPS will provide for electronic submission of crash report information in the future, the existing problems with reporting toxicology results will remain unchanged without a concerted effort to increase awareness of the importance of reporting this information.

The proposed project will address the following goals:

1. Survey agencies and individuals involved in collecting and reporting toxicology results in order to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding of laws and procedures for reporting crash information.
2. Develop and disseminate materials outlining the laws, requirements, and procedures for reporting toxicology results by law enforcement officers, DPS Crime Lab personnel, M.E.s, Justices of the Peace acting as

coroners in counties without an M.E. Office, and other officials and staff responsible for reporting comprehensive, accurate, and timely information to the CRIS database.

3. Assist DPS and M.E. Offices with facilitating timely electronic submission of toxicology results for inclusion in the CRIS and FARS databases.
4. Continue to work with DPS and FARS coders to improve the quality and reliability of toxicology results for drivers and pedestrians killed in traffic crashes in Texas.

[1] National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. *Traffic Safety Facts: Alcohol 2002*, Table 6.

[2] National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. U.S. Department of Transportation. *Traffic Safety Facts: State Alcohol Estimates 2002*, Table 6.

[3] Davies, B.T. (1999). *Analysis of BAC Testing and Reporting in Texas*, Final Report prepared for the Traffic Safety Section, Texas Department of Transportation.

[4] Davies, B.T. (1999). *Alcohol Involvement in Texas Driver Fatalities,* Final Report prepared for the Traffic Safety Section, Texas Department of Transportation.

[5] Davies, B.T. (1996). *Alcohol Involvement in Texas Driver Fatalities*, Final Report prepared for the Traffic Safety Section, Texas Department of Transportation.