

STATEMENT OF  
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**December 16, 2004**

- Today, we are here to unveil what the states have done or have not done in the past year to address a leading cause of preventable death for our children and young adults.
- Last year, we had some good news that overall traffic deaths declined slightly. However, the bad news is that it was only a “slight” improvement and not a “significant” improvement. In fact, every year since 1992 more than 40,000 Americans have been killed by motor vehicle crashes and 3 million more injured at a cost to society of \$230 billion annually.
- Since 1992, a half million people have died on our streets and roads and 36 million more have been injured.
- As a former emergency physician, I have seen first-hand the devastation caused by motor vehicle crashes and regrettably, it has fallen to me to inform moms and dads, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives that their loved ones did not make it.
- What makes this all the more tragic is that in many cases, these deaths and injuries did not need to happen if people had been doing something as simple as buckling up or wearing a motorcycle helmet. Last year, more than half of those killed in motor vehicle crashes were not buckled up.
- The number of motor vehicle deaths and injuries are overwhelming to those of us working in the field of public health because we know they are preventable.
- With 117 people dying every day from motor vehicle crashes, we have an epidemic on our hands. As a public health official facing this epidemic, I look for a cure or a vaccine that can directly stop the spread of the problem.
- That vaccine is proven, cheap, and readily available today. Some states use it, unfortunately, many states do not. It is the adoption of traffic safety laws to protect the driving public. These include laws that require everyone to buckle up, wear a motorcycle helmet, put your child in a booster seat, get tough with drunk drivers and protect new teen drivers and their friends.
- There is also a need for more federal leadership on these issues. Advocates have been working to promote enactment of federal legislation that will coax all states to adopt primary enforcement seat belt laws. This legislation was sponsored last year by Sen. John Warner (R-VA) and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY). Today, only 21 states and DC allow police to ticket someone simply for not using a seat belt.
- Last year, only one state, Tennessee, passed a primary enforcement seat belt law. At this rate, it will be 2033 before every state has a primary seat belt law.
- It’s time to move on this federal legislation because the slow pace of adoption in the states is killing us. Federal leadership worked for us on the 21 drinking age, and .08% BAC laws, and it’s time to have uniformity in the states on seat belt enforcement.