NEWS AND NOTES

Declining traffic death rates in the UK

As reported in Child Safety Review (Child Accident Prevention Trust), child road casualties in the UK fell by 3% in 1995. This represents a saving of 29 lives compared with the previous year and over 4000 fewer serious injuries. These accomplishments are even more impressive in light of an estimated 2%, increase in traffic (MH).

... but increasing fireworks injuries

In contrast to the ‘good news’ road statistics, fireworks injuries have risen sharply in the UK, from 723 in 1991 to over 1500 in 1994 (MH).

Helmet campaign in Washington State

Geared at low income, 3–5 year olds, a campaign in Washington State aims to increase helmet use by: educational materials including classroom sessions for children and parents; a bicycle rodeo; training teachers and teachers aides; fitting helmets in the schools before the rodeo and giving out coupons that entitle older brothers and sisters to free helmets. To its great credit, this program includes a simple, but persuasive evaluation component based on observations at a sample of sites (MH).

Walk to school

Ian Roberts, in a thoughtful essay in Child Safety News (Summer 1996) argues that ‘safe routes’ are a misnomer — that the safest way to get a child to school in the UK at present ‘is to strap them into the back of the car and drive them there’. The clincher statistic is that ‘for children under 15, a mile on foot is nearly 50 times more dangerous than a mile by car’. Roberts is not really advocating more car transport because this would increase traffic volume and thus injuries for those who do walk. Instead, he concludes that transport policy must change to discourage car use by adults on good incomes. He suggests this might be fostered by having ‘Walk to Work’ or ‘Walk to Westminster’ weeks so that adults can experience pedestrian risks themselves (MH).

Injury control in Africa

A draft of the proceedings of a round table session and associated meetings, edited by Forjuoh, Zwi, and Rimer, is available from the Centre for Injury Research and Control, University of Pittsburgh. The topics include: injury control researchers from Africa: getting to know one another; getting governments to do more; what next after the round table session; and several useful appendices with listings of researchers and participants (SF).

Shopping cart dangers

A group of American pediatrics, after treating 62 children with shopping cart related injuries over a 15 month period, recommend that these carts be redesigned and that until they are children should not ride in them (Forjuoh, Pediatrics). Forty nine of the 62 had head injuries, two associated with loss of consciousness. Most were caused by children falling out of carts or carts tipping over and it is the latter that demands redesign (T Murray, Medical Post, March 1996).

Road carnage: international solutions?

In light of the Opinion/Dissent in the June issue debating whether western approaches to injury control can be adapted for developing countries, an article from a South African newspaper raises the issue. The writer (V Gilby) argues that Australian solutions are inappropriate for South Africa. ‘Until we feed, house, educate and employ our people meaningfully and have an effective driving licence system . . . the South African (Australia) road safety plan’, Gilby writes. He adds, ‘In South Africa we need the money for tyres not airbags’ (DB).

Redesigned baby walker

‘Walk In Place’ is a new kind of stationary infant walker that appears to be a safe alternative to the old, mobile, dangerous ones. It has a plastic trundle wheel beneath the seat so that infants can ‘walk’ without going anywhere. A clever idea that so far appears as safe as it claims (C Cornall, Globe and Mail, 3 February 1996).

Rising drunken driving deaths

The New York Times (8 July 1996) reported that for the first time in a decade, US drunken driving deaths have risen — by 4% over the previous year. Equally alarming is that 1995 was the third successive year that transportation related deaths had increased in the US, with the figure for highway accidents being up by nearly 1000 (AG).

Mothers Against Violence in America (MAVIA)

The goal of this two year old Seattle based organization is to help teach kids that ‘violence is neither cool nor normal’. Its founder, Pam Eakes, says, ‘Kids don’t think guns are as cool as they used to be. They know kids who have died. They have gone to the funeral’. MAVIA recently received a $100,000 grant to support and expand its SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) program, now in 27 schools in the Puget Sound region. MAVIA’s modelled after the highly effective model Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) (D Harrell, Seattle Post Intelligencer) (AG).

Injuries to the eye

Using data from the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, R Saltus writing in the Boston Globe (8 July 1996), describes the rising total of eye injuries from sports and recreational activities. One result is a campaign to require protective eyewear in school field hockey, spearheaded by a parent whose 12 year old child lost the sight of one eye when hit by a flailing hockey stick. In the US in 1995 over 9000 children had eye injuries attributed to sports activities. Despite the obvious dangers in field hockey, baseball and softball remain the leading causes (AG).

Swimming pool dangers

The New York Times reports that after the death of a 5 year old at a public pool the previous year, new rules require swimmers under age 16 to be 8 inches taller than a pool’s maximum depth or be accompanied by a parent or guardian (D Hershenhorn, 4 July 1996) (AG).

Mayor opposed helmet bylaw

‘We’ll be better off educating cyclists’, opines the warden of Montreal in defense of his opposition to a helmet law. ‘It’s not a priority’, and ‘would be difficult to enforce’. (Editor’s note: he is probably right, given the level of enforcement for other traffic violations. Adding to the note, the deputy president of Group Velo contended that the law would discourage people from cycling and penalize low income cyclists. (Editor’s note: good helmets are now available in Montreal for $11) (Gazette, 9 July 1996) (AA).

Canadian parents urged to avoid US certified car seats

The Canadian Automobile Association advises parents that US certified seats are not bargain in Canada because tether straps are not always provided with them whereas Canadian standards require them and only seats certified by Canadian MV Safety Standards are legal in Canada (AA).

New airbag concerns

Ted Miller, Director of the Children’s Safety Network Economics and Insurance Resource Center, writes: ‘We now know of 15 children in the US who were not in reaercing child seats and were killed by passenger airbags. NTSB thinks one of these children was properly belted, and second case may fall into that category (at least in the opinion of plaintiff’s counsel).’ Dr. Daniel Beller at the Children’s Hospital in Washington, DC has two serious head injury survivors who he feels were injured by the airbag, were properly restrained, and would not have been seriously injured if the airbag was absent), please e-mail or fax me a 2–4 sentence report? Include the victim’s name if possible, or at least age, sex, and jurisdiction so I can eliminate duplicates (ISCPMNEF).

Airbag injuries

Staff at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia have also been studying airbag associated childhood injuries. They report having seen two deaths and one serious injury to restrained children as a result of airbag deployment but have also seen at least four other children who were uninjured when airbags were deployed — two of whom were sitting on someone’s lap in the right front seat when the airbag was deployed. All three cases were reported to the Special Crash Investigation Program at National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) . . . and were investigated by NHTSA and NTSB. (Further details: Hollands, Winston, et al, Lethal airbag injury in an infant, Pediatric Emergency Care, May/June 1996 issue.)

Airbags and auto dealers

The University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center has worked with the New Car Dealers Association . . . to promote the correct use of automatic seat belts and airbags. They developed hang tags for dealers to attach to rear view mirrors as part of a project to develop community awareness and incentives. Impromptu responses, they evaluated the program’s effectiveness and found that belt use and correct automatic belt use increased. It appears that dealers realize that ‘safety
sells' and that community service programs are good business. 'A good win/win is a program that provides parents a service while getting potential customers into the showroom for the auto dealers' (BBS posting, L Marchetti).

Produced by the British Standards Institution

Rental cars and car seats

Few car rental agencies have a tether anchor bolt installed because they believe it lowers the resale value of the car, and believe it is not wanted by most of their customers. With some companies, there is also a concern about liability. Some parents have reported that by offering to install the anchor bolt themselves and remove it later, they were permitted to do so in a rental car. If a tether anchor bolt is not available, it is possible to tether to a seat belt directly behind the car seat (CCSN BBS).

Coding pedestrian injuries

A 'thread' from PEDNET addresses the coding of pedestrian injuries. 'It is still annoying to see the categories that pedestrian car crashes are put into ... for example, an 'intersection dart' or a 'mid-block dart', etc. The assumption is always that the pedestrian 'darted' out in front of the innocent driver. How does the 'corder's manual' tell you to classify a crash where an elderly woman was proceeding across a local street at an unmarked intersection, at noon on a sunny day, was hit and killed? Would this be an 'intersection dart'? The driver was not charged with any criminal action in this case ... However, the driver couldn't plausibly claim that she has 'darted' out in front of the car. Neither could he claim that it was at night, and 'the pedestrian was wearing dark clothing'. So, he just claimed he didn't see her. She just appeared out of nowhere' or some such thing. The district attorney even felt it necessary to explain why he wasn't prosecuting the driver. 'It was just ordinary negligence', he said. 'Only if the driver was also drunk, prove a deliberate intention not to pay attention to what he was doing, could it be criminal negligence' (PEDNET BBS).

A terminology question

Peter Jacobsen, of Pasadena, CA, a frequent contributor to PEDNET asks: 'Can anyone suggest a term to combine motor vehicle injuries to pedestrians and bicyclists? Occasionally one reads term 'motor vehicle non-occupant' but it's awkward. The terms 'unprotected' or 'vulnerable road user' suffer from being absolute, when really it's relative — would anyone contend motor vehicle occupants are protected or invulnerable? The term 'light road user' seems to be popular in Europe, but then again a motorist is only really a middle road user in comparison with semitailers and buses' (PEDNET BBS).

Fourth International Conference on Product Safety Research

The European Consumer Safety Association (ECOSA) and the Australian Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs organised the Fourth International Conference on Product Safety Research, Canberra, 15–16 February 1996. The conference dealt with research into a wide range of subjects related to the safety of consumer products. The proceedings of the conference, containing the full texts of the presented papers, are now available (price Dfl 100) from ECOSA, PO Box 75169, NL-1070 AD, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Mothers against drunk driving (MADD)

A government proposal to eliminate up to 160 crown attorneys in Canada will have 'a devastating effect on the battle against impaired driving', MADD Canada founder, John Bates, stated. Even impaired drivers involved in fatal crashes may never be required to face justice because of an overloaded judicial system. 'It is unthinkable that any government could be so unfeeling about the serious nature of the problem of impaired driving — still the largest killer of our young people. Bates went on to say that the recent announcement 'pulls the teeth' of the recently announced 90 day suspension for drivers found to have more than 80 milligrams of alcohol in their system. 'The whole idea behind administrative licence suspension is to get impaired drivers off the road until their trial date ... Eliminating over 33% of the crown attorneys will render this new initiative almost useless' (CCSN BBS).

SAFE KIDS new video

The SAFE KIDS National Campaign has produced a new video targeted at kids up to age 14. It avoids preaching at adults, letting a group of normal kids tell their story and letting the audience reach its own conclusions rather than dealing out heavy doses of 'wear a helmet'. The title is 'Jello in a Jar'. There is a moving interview with a boy who has been head injured without a helmet, who describes how his life fell apart and concludes 'it sucks'. Available from SAFE KIDS: +1 612 295-4135; item # 0087 ($20) (AM).

Another income differential

Teaching elementary schoolchildren about the importance of bicycle helmets increases their use dramatically. Or so says a study recently published by the American Journal of Public Health (January 1996). Researchers followed a four year helmet promotion campaign in Quebec. They found that before the study, almost no children used helmets, whereas one third did afterward. That leaves quite a bit of room for improvement but it also no doubt saved some young lives. One problem: the education campaign worked much more effectively in wealthier communities then in poor ones. Evidently, lower class children couldn't afford helmets, even though the campaign included coupons to lower helmet price. The project included posters, pamphlets, games, awards for helmet use, etc.

Playground dangers

A 2.5 year old girl died in Boston when the drawing on her sweatshirt hood snagged on the top of a slide. Federal safety officials said 'the tragedy could have been avoided if only their warnings about the dangers of drawstrings ... has been heeded'. (Editor's note: why not a ban on their manufacture, as Britain did in 1976? Talk about blaming the victim! Bills of this sort are now under consideration in Massachusetts and Connecticut and some children's clothing stores have voluntarily refused to carry such clothing. At the very least the warning should be included with the sale of children's clothing. See editorial this issue) (Patriot Ledger, 16 May 1996) (AG). (Postscript) The Boston Globe (1 June 1996) indicates that a bill is to be introduced that would outlaw the sale and manufacture in Massachusetts of children's clothing with drawstrings at the neck or waist) (AG).

Wrong foot forward

A report by Transportation Alternatives, entitled 'The Wrong Foot Forward', analyzed New York City's 'Transportation Improvement Program' (a five year plan), and found that although pedestrians are the majority of traffic deaths over 95%; of safety funds were to be dedicated to motorist safety.

Traffic calming — US style

The April and May editions of the Urban Transportation Monitor reported on a survey of traffic engineers regarding traffic calming techniques. The Monitor noted that among US traffic calming literature 'what is available today mostly are lists of suggested techniques, lacking a rigorous research foundation that quantifies the impact on accidents, speed, etc, and documents their effectiveness under different conditions. Investing in such research would be money well spent'.

Reducing fatalities: New York City v London

Vigorous traffic calming and traffic enforcement programs and stringent driver licensing requirements introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the UK appear to be making a real difference in saving lives. Compare London to New York City (NYC), where traffic law enforcement is weak and traffic calming has yet to begin (table shows traffic deaths):

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1984</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>1990</td>
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Aggression at speed

An article in the New York Times noted a recent survey, showing that aggressive drivers displaced drunk drivers as those posing the greatest concern. The Times also noted the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, who says 22% of urban crashes stem from red light running.
Alcohol related traffic crashes and fatalities among youth 1982–94

Approximately one third of the deaths among persons 15–24 years result from motor vehicle crashes. Information on alcohol involved driving collected by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and reported by CDC indicates that the decline in alcohol involvement among drivers in fatal motor vehicle crashes during 1982–9 continued through 1994 but the proportion of alcohol involved drivers aged 15–17 years declined more slowly from 1990 through 1994. The findings emphasize the need for additional prevention efforts targeted specifically to young drivers — including zero tolerance laws, which prohibit alcohol use by underage drivers (MMWR 1 December, 1995; 44: 47) (DS).

Guns: there but for the grace of God and good policy go us

This was the title suggested by Ian Scott to accompany an article stating that three of the US' largest toy retailers have banned the selling of realistic toy guns after two New York City boys were shot by police who mistook their play for the real thing. The article concludes, 'Toy guns are among the most popular playthings in the US... retail sales of toy guns... were valued at about $327 million in the previous year' (The Australian, 17 October 1994) (IS).

Restraints in aircraft: mixed messages

A recent controversy over a bill in Congress to make FAA require infants to ride buckled up in aircraft, has erupted on a listserver. One argument is that if parents are required to pay for a seat on which to put the restraint, they will be diverted to use 'more hazardous' highway travel. Against this, the Air Transport Association supports the infant seat requirement and argues that no airline would choose to risk losing the business of an entire family because they're charging too much for an infant (Seattle Post, 4 September 1995).

Water watch — keep children safe

This new collection of fact sheets, picture quizzes, water safety activities, and a PFD (personal flotation device) test, has recently been distributed by the Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Services. The material look impressive; all that remains is for them to be evaluated.

More shocking statistics

In the US since 1984 homicides by those under age 18 have risen 418% (New York Times, 8 July 1996) (AG).

Tracking gun sales to youths

A Federal computer system is being created in the US to track the illegal sale of guns to young people as part of an initiative to halt the sharp rise in gun violence. A pilot program in Boston has been so successful that no juveniles have yet been killed by guns this year. The computer system involves 17 cities' police chiefs and prosecutors pledging to provide information on every gun they seize from a juvenile during a crime (F Butterfield, New York Times, 8 July 1996).

More truck horrors

A truck with faulty brakes killed three young children and two of their grandparents in Massachusetts. The truck driver, who admitted falling asleep at the wheel, was arrested and charged with vehicular homicide. In addition to five charges of vehicular homicide the driver was charged with: no log book, defective brakes, possession of a radar detector in a commercial vehicle, having the sleeper compartment occupied, and failing to conduct a pretrip inspection. He and his two passengers were unhurt (Patriot Ledger, 17 June 1996) (AG).

An unrelated report describes the efforts of Citizens for Reliable and Safer Highways to improve truck safety. The coalition has been stimulated to new action by several trucking deaths involving in one case an inexperienced, overworked driver; in another an overloaded truck with three of its six brakes not working (Patriot Ledger, 6 July 1996) (AG).

Three child safety products under investigation

A nylon net designed to prevent a child from falling from a balcony, a guard to keep children away from stove burners, and a plastic knob cover to prevent a child from turning on a burner, are all being investigated by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission as possible hazards following tests by Consumer Reports. All are manufactured by Safety 1st in Massachusetts (R Kindleberger, Boston Globe, 29 May 1996) (AG).

Farm and rural safety elementary school curriculum available

The Seeds of Safety farm and rural safety curriculum for second and fifth grade students is now available. This curriculum contains information about numerous safety topics including: finding grain hazards, safety around animals, law mowers dangers, emergency response, and recreational vehicle injuries. The curriculum is contained in an attractive notebook designed by the Farm Safety and Health Coalition serving five counties in northwest Minnesota. To order contact Colleen Nelson at +1 218 874-7845 ($20.00) (CCSN BBS).

Pool safety reminders

CPSC in the US reminds parents that 'A child can drown in the time it takes to answer the phone'. It recommends a fence or barrier at least 4 feet high, with no footholds or handholds surrounding the entire pool, the use of alarms if a wall of the house serves as a side of the barrier, and a power safety cover to protect the pool when it is not in use.

Contributors: Mike Hayes (MH), Sam Forjush (SF), David Bass (DB), Anara Guard (AG), Ian Scott (IS), Ann Arnold (AA), Angela Mickalide (AM), David Sleet (DS).