

Road to Zero Annual Meeting Remarks

Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA

Thursday, February 4, 2021

Good afternoon, I'm Dr. Steve Cliff, and I'm so happy to be here with you today. Lorraine, I've heard from others at NHTSA about your strong support for our safety programs, and I look forward to getting to know you.

As you may know, I'm new to NHTSA – very new, in fact, since Tuesday was my first day! I'm very glad to be joining the great team at NHTSA and continuing to serve the American public.

I have been a public servant my entire career, first for 10 years as a scientist at the University of California, Davis. And for the past 12 years, I've served in various technical and leadership roles in California government at the California Air Resources Board, known as CARB, and the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans.

At CARB, I served as the Deputy Executive Officer overseeing numerous environmental vehicle regulations, including passenger vehicle emissions and medium- and heavy-duty engine emissions. I was also a member of the Transportation Research Board's Executive Committee.

When not at work, I enjoy biking and know firsthand the importance of ensuring proper infrastructure and driver education so our cyclists are safe on the roads.

I look forward to doing everything I can to support NHTSA's 600-plus employees in our shared mission to save lives and make our roads safer for everyone.

Our team at NHTSA continues its analysis of traffic safety during the pandemic and our work to respond to the risky driving trends we've identified over the past year.

Last month, NHTSA released new data on the trends over the first nine months of 2020. Nanda Srinivasan will be with you later to go into more detail, but the overall picture is very concerning.

The risky driving behaviors we observed early on in 2020 continued into the third quarter, as the drivers who were on the road tended to take more risks. The data suggest that many people are driving faster, especially at excessive speeds.

We've seen an increase in alcohol and drug use in seriously and fatally injured drivers and passengers through September 2020. The data suggest that alcohol- and other drug-positive drivers and passengers who were seriously or fatally injured were much less likely to wear a seat belt as compared to those who tested negative.

The result? A 13.1% increase in fatalities from July to September, as compared to the same time in 2019.

This makes our work – and your work – even more critical. The Road to Zero movement has never been more important than it is at this very moment, and this Administration strongly supports the Road to Zero Coalition and other efforts to reduce fatalities on our roads.

This Administration also believes in the safe system approach, which recognizes that everyone – including those who design, build, operate, and use the road system – shares in the responsibility for road safety. And we need to ensure that our transportation systems are safe for everyone.

The U.S. Department of Transportation will fully integrate the needs of all road users – not just drivers and passengers but pedestrians, cyclists, children, older Americans, and people with disabilities – as we move forward over the next four years.

Together, we can make our streets, cities, and neighborhoods safer for everyone, and I look forward to meeting you all in the coming months and learning more about your lifesaving work.

Thank you very much.