



Admiral's CORNER

FROM COMMANDER, NAVAL SAFETY CENTER



Great New Technology, But You Still Have To Use It

The auto industry is doing its part to make driving safer. For example, one popular new SUV features a sensor that estimates the driver's size by his distance from the steering wheel. Another sensor detects if the passenger seat is empty, or is occupied by a child or a small, medium or large adult.

How about an air bag that deploys in one of two sizes? That's what you get with the purchase of a well-known American luxury car today. The severity of a crash, seat-belt use, and occupant-seat position determine what size bag inflates.

Granted, not everyone can afford—or, for that matter, even wants—a car like the ones that have these new safety devices. At least, these innovations work automatically—unlike the seat belts in most cars. Look at the efforts still being invested just to get people to take the two or three seconds necessary to buckle up each time they get in a car.

In September 2005, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta announced we're making progress in that area. The national safety-belt-use rate stood at 82 percent in September. That's a rise of 21 percentage points since the first national law-enforcement mobilization in 1997.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that the job still isn't done. We keep losing Sailors and Marines on our nation's highways. Consider a 20-year-old PO3, who, on the same day his ship returned to port, went on liberty, illegally acquired beer or liquor, and consumed an unknown quantity. He then got behind the wheel of his car and, according to witnesses, was driving an estimated 100 mph when he missed a curve in the road. The vehicle flipped several times, ejecting the PO3, who died at a trauma center.

It wasn't like the ship's leadership didn't try to prevent this tragedy. There was ongoing shipwide emphasis on drinking and driving responsibly, and, just the day before arrival in port, the CO, XO and CMC had addressed all hands on this topic. Nevertheless, the PO3 chose to acquire alcohol illegally, to drink excessively, to ignore his seat belt, and to drive his car at twice the posted speed limit.

Safety features are nice, but, as we see from this story, they can't make up for people who simply make the wrong choices. Our current challenge is to teach all hands to make the right ones.

RADM George Mayer

Where We Stand

Year-to-Date Comparison Through Jan. 30

