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**AS TRAFFIC FATALITIES HIT 13-YEAR HIGH, NEW LOU HARRIS POLL SHOWS  
NEAR UNANIMOUS PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTION TO  
IMPROVE VEHICLE SAFETY STANDARDS TO STEM RISING TIDE OF DEATHS**

*Crash Survivor Activists Urge Congress to Adopt Auto Safety Provisions in S.1072,  
Senate-Passed SAFETEA, to Curb Deadly Rollover Crashes, Occupant Ejections,  
Vehicle Roof Crush, and Violent Mismatch of SUVs and Cars in Crashes*

Average American Burdened with \$792 Annual “Crash Tax” from Death and Injury Toll;  
Safety Advocates Say Auto Safety Improvements Will Save Lives and Taxpayer Dollars

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 12, 2004) – With highway fatalities hitting a 13-year high and rollover crashes on the rise in 2003, nine of ten Americans say they support the federal government setting stronger uniform auto safety standards, according to a new Lou Harris Poll released today.

The Harris Poll found that 84 percent of the American public, including 8 of 10 SUV owners, favor the U.S. government requiring manufacturers to make all motor vehicles, including SUVs, more stable and less likely to rollover in crashes.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death of Americans from ages 1 to 34. An estimated 43,000 people died in traffic crashes in 2003, the highest since 1990 and the fourth consecutive year that traffic deaths have risen. Deaths from vehicle rollover crashes also are on the rise, including a 10 percent jump in fatalities resulting from SUV rollover crashes last year.

The Harris “Survey of the Attitudes of the American People on Highway and Auto Safety” comes as Congress nears a vote on a long-awaited six-year \$318 billion transportation bill known as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA). Vehicle safety provisions in SAFETEA passed the U.S. Senate in February, but were not included in the House bill. House and Senate conferees are meeting to work out differences in the two versions, and a decision could come before Congress goes on summer recess this month.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety ([www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org)) is urging Congress to stem the rising tide of highway deaths by adopting the Senate-passed motor vehicle safety provisions that would reduce deadly rollover crashes, occupant ejection, vehicle roof crush, the violent mismatch of crashes between SUVs and cars, improve child safety and at the same time provide consumers new vehicle safety rating sticker information at the point-of-purchase in dealership showrooms.

“The specific technologies to address these problems are available right now. They don’t have to be invented,” said Judith Lee Stone, President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. “These features should be standard equipment for all car buyers, not mere options for those who

can afford it. The question is will the Congress move forward or take yet another detour or U-turn. This is a matter of life or death for thousands, and the Congress holds the key.”

The annual economic cost of motor vehicle crashes is \$230.6 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Stone said that in effect “the average American is saddled with a ‘Crash Tax’ of \$792 and the typical family of four is burdened with a ‘Crash Tax’ of \$3,168 every year.”

Rollover crashes resulted in 114,819 deaths in the U.S. from 1991 through 2002. The top ten states with the most rollover deaths during that time period were California (11,874), Texas (10,051), Florida (5,424), North Carolina (4,149), Missouri (4,104), Georgia (4,091), Tennessee (3,686), Alabama (3,511), Illinois (3,441), and Pennsylvania (3,293).

“The Harris Poll shows that the American public is way ahead of government in terms of wanting greater safety standards in their automobiles and their willingness to pay for it,” said Stone.

Other key findings from Harris Poll:

- 9 out of 10 of adults surveyed want the government to step in and set auto safety standards.
- More than 90-percent of adults surveyed said they’d be willing to pay \$200 to \$300 more for safety improvements to new cars
- 83% of adults surveyed favor requiring stickers to be placed on the windshield of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over
- 55% of adults surveyed favor the government to require Electronic Stability Control (ESC) devices to be installed in new cars to help prevent rollover.
- Only 31% are aware of a government website that has contains customer information about how likely it is for various types of vehicles to roll over.
- 83% to 14% favor requiring stickers to be placed on the windshield of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over.
- Improved Seatbelts--An 82% to 17% majority nationwide would like to see the government require improvements in seat belts to better protect passengers during rollovers.
- Stronger Roof Standard--An 83% majority “wants the government to require a major upgrading of roof safety standards to withstand the weight of the car when it rolls over.”
- Among the public as a whole, 83% are concerned about severe crashes that occur when mismatched vehicles like SUVs collide with smaller vehicles. This is an increase over the 74% response in 1998.
- 81% favor “stronger vehicle roofs so that windshields don’t pop out of the frame so easily during a crash.”
- 81% support safer door locks and latches so that doors to not fly open in crashes.

- 78% also favor “stronger side door window glass, like that in windshields, that won’t crumble in a crash.”
- 70% support “side air bag curtains that drop from the vehicle roof and come between the person and the side door and window.”

Survey respondents were asked how much more money they would be willing to pay for vehicle safety improvements. Back in 1996, when Harris asked the same question of the American public, 75 percent said they would pay the extra money. The 2004 survey found 91 percent willing to pay up to \$300 more for safety improvements.

Also addressing today’s National Press Club news announcement to urge Congress to approve the Senate-passed bill were:

Patrick Parker of Childress, Texas, who at the age of 37 became a quadriplegic from a rollover crash near his home on August 29, 2001. Parker was injured when he swerved and avoided a deer, and then while correcting, hit a second deer on the front corner of the truck. The truck rolled immediately upon impact, with the cab crushing and breaking his neck. Parker was accompanied by his wife Dena Parker.

Beverly Taylor of Raleigh, North Carolina, whose daughter Lauren Braddy, age 21 and a graduating senior at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa died in an SUV rollover crash while on spring break in Florida with three of her sorority sisters on March 28, 2004. Ms. Taylor was joined by Carrie Thornton, 20, of Marietta, Georgia, who was a sorority sister of the four crash victims. She spoke of her friends Christin Lancaster of Tuscaloosa who died in the crash, and Hannah Jones of Dothan, Alabama, and Mary McGinness of Lookout Mountain, Georgia, who were injured.

Joan Claybrook, President of Public Citizen ([www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org)) and board member of Advocates said “On these critical auto safety matters the government has delayed for years, even decades. This has resulted in thousands being maimed and slaughtered on our highways. The American public is paying for these crashes with their lives and their wallets and they want government action now.”

Another Advocates board member, Alan Maness, Federal Affairs Director and Associate General Counsel for State Farm Insurance Companies, said, “These child safety provisions will go a long way toward improving the auto safety environment for child passengers throughout the nation, and we call for their adoption.”

On behalf of Louis Harris, the Peter Harris Research Group completed a total of 1003 telephone interviews with randomly selected adults aged 18 years and older between May 14, 2004 and June 3, 2004. At the 95 percent level of confidence, the margin of error for a representative, national cross-section survey of 1003 respondents is approximately  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.

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*Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety is an alliance of consumer, health and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to make America's roads and vehicles safer. Advocates encourages the adoption of federal and state laws, policies and programs that we know will prevent death and disabling injuries. Additional information may be found on their web page at [www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org)*

**Remarks of Louis Harris**  
**Press Conference**  
**Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**July 12, 2004**

For the fifth time since 1996, I have some major results from our latest poll to report to you. As usual, conventional wisdom had better be prepared for some rude shocks. These results are hot off the griddle, since our in-depth survey was taken among a cross-section of 1003 adults between May 14 and June 3. The respected Peter Harris research group conducted all interviews by telephone.

Let me get right down to cases. Everyone knows that the leading edge of all auto vehicle sales is SUVs. They are the sacred cows. The common assumption in this town is that anything that is a hot seller, something people can't get enough of is untouchable. Above all, don't introduce the dead hand of government regulations or controls on cars and SUVs.

Well, my big news is that this assumption is dead wrong. And I will proceed to tell you why right now. Each year, crashes involving the rollover of vehicles result in more than 10,000 deaths. This is about a fourth of all deaths from motor vehicles. Yet, there are literally no government regulations, which might prevent rollover in passenger vehicles, including SUVs. Also, regulations to protect occupants in rollover crashes when they do happen are weak and decades-old.

We asked the American people directly and in depth about rollovers and SUVs. By 84% to 13%, a majority of the American people believes "the government should create safety rules that require manufacturers to make all passenger vehicles, including SUVs more stable and less likely to roll over." SUV owners favor this regulation by 82% to 14%. Mark this result well.

It means that SUV owners want strongly to be protected against rollovers in their vehicles. They don't want to give up their favorite vehicles. But they don't want to die in them, either. But, hold on, I haven't begun to give you all the results of what we asked.

Fully 86% of the public nationwide is aware of the problem of rollovers in SUVs. Among SUV owners 85% know rollovers in SUVs is a problem.

One concrete step that might be taken to underscore the risks of rollovers in SUVs met with widespread acceptance. That would be to require that stickers be placed on the windshields of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over. An 83% to 14% majority of the American people want such a posting on any new car they buy.

And guess what: among SUV owners, an 84% to 12% majority of SUV owners favor having such a sticker on their own car when they buy it. You might ask if the public is uniformly in favor of this idea. There are some softer segments: people who live in the west, where they drive more and take longer trips. The majority favoring stickers on windshields reporting the risk of rollovers is a lower 77% in the west and an even lower 71% of people whose family incomes are

above \$100,000, and a lesser 79% of men are in favor, compared with 87% of women. Of course, having reported these differences, it is well to remember that big majorities of all groups in the population support putting such stickers on the windshields of all new cars.

Another regulatory measure is this: install electronic stability controls to prevent cars from rolling over. Such devices are quite common in Europe. A 55% to 39% majority across the country favors requiring putting these electronic devices in all cars. A higher than average 64% of all SUV owners favor having the devices put in their vehicles.

Two other safety measures which could prevent injury or death in crashes were also tested. Advanced seat belts that tighten or loosen at different times during a crash to protect passengers during a vehicle rollover are favored by an 82% to 17% majority of the nation. A higher 83% of SUV owners also favor such seat belts. A second suggestion calls for requiring a major upgrading of roof safety standards to withstand the weight of the car when it rolls over. Nationwide, 83% favor such a requirement strengthening roof safety standards. Among SUV owners, a slightly higher 84% favor such a requirement.

Yet another problem involving SUVs was probed by our poll: mismatched collisions between SUVs and smaller cars. 2 in 3 people know about the dangers of such collisions. Yet, when we asked how concerned they were about these crashes between the larger SUVs and smaller passenger cars, 83% were “some-what” or “very concerned” about the problem. However, less than a majority, 47% were “very concerned.” Among SUV owners, a lower 41% said they were “very concerned.”

These results are significant. You might have been wondering about SUV owners being so worried about rollovers and safety requirements. But, when it comes to worrying about the people who might get injured or killed in a crash between their SUV and a smaller passenger vehicle, they are less concerned. The reason: they are deeply worried and downright scared of the safety problems that might affect their own lives. As for their feeling sorry about smaller cars they might crash into: well, they care but not as much!

We also asked about measures that can be taken to prevent passenger ejections from vehicles, an obvious problem in SUV and other rollovers. An 81% to 16% majority favors “installing stronger vehicle roofs so that windshields don’t pop out of the frame so easily during a crash.” An identical majority favors “safer door locks and latches so that doors don’t fly open in crashes.” A 78% to 19% majority favors “stronger side door window glass, like that in windshields, that won’t crumble in a crash.” By 70% to 22%, a majority supports “side air bag curtains that drop from the vehicle roof and come between the person and the side door and window.”

And, by 85% to 14%, a bigger majority favors “the government requiring better seat belts to prevent people from being ejected in crashes.” SUV owners opted for all of these measures by close to the national averages. We also asked our cross-section bluntly how each person would react to having such safety measures being required as standard equipment in all new passenger vehicles. A 71% to 26% majority supports such a new requirement.

We asked people how much extra they would be willing to pay to get these new safety standards installed in the next new car they might buy. We asked the same question back in our first survey in 1996. Back then, 75% opted for paying \$200 to \$300 more for such safety standards. Now, an almost unanimous 91% favors paying that amount.

At a time when adding to the price of motor vehicles underscores how vital and crucial safety standards are to the American people, it is my view that what I have just reported is no less than astounding. For it flies in the face of conventional wisdom in this town that more government regulation of any kind simply won't be tolerated by the American people. Well, we asked about such regulation covering health and safety matters. That was the first question in the entire survey. A full 91% of the American people favors, not opposes, the government setting such safety and health standards. The reason? People care deeply about their health and safety. It is a matter of no less than their life or death. Opposition to government regulations literally melts away when it comes to basic health and safety considerations.

Finally, the poll indicated that Americans are not only concerned about safety in vehicles, but about their safety on the road with big trucks. By large margins in all cases, they favor the mandatory installation of "black boxes" on all trucks (84%, up from 81% three years ago). This technology would cut down on drivers attempting to push the limit on hours driven. 70% of Americans oppose increasing truck weight limits, and they come down decisively with 80% saying they feel that trucks with 2 or more trailers are less safe. These consistent findings run contrary to what is going on in congress where attempts to diminish truck safety are common.

The bottom line: any politician this election year who categorically wants to diminish or eliminate government health and safety regulations, could be in deep trouble. And I don't care what region or community they come from. Specifically, in the case of the new sacred cow among vehicles, the SUVs, I would suggest one basic step: just ask SUV owners. They want their SUVs, make no mistake about that. But they want the safest SUVs that money can buy. They are even willing to pay more for such safety. Why? Because they feel their own lives are endangered unless just this kind of regulation is exercised. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that by invoking tough safety standards, sales of SUVs might actually increase. And the number of people dying from rollovers and SUV crashes might be sharply diminished.

My final word of advice to the automotive and political communities: get over your fetish of blindly opposing government regulation per se. Adopt regulations that mandate making new cars safer. That looks to me to be a win-win proposition all around!

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS**

**“A Survey of the Attitudes of the American People on Highway & Auto Safety”**  
*Wave Five of a Periodic Tracking Survey*

***A Public Opinion Poll conducted by***

**LOUIS HARRIS**

*For*

**ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY**

*July 2004*

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, health, safety and insurance groups working together to advance highway and auto safety, recently sought to determine how Americans feel about specific highway and auto safety issues, especially as they relate to motor vehicle safety and to regulatory inventions. To do so, Advocates commissioned a well-known national pollster, Louis Harris, to survey a cross-section of 1,003 adults between May 14 and June 3, 2004. This is the fifth poll Harris has conducted for Advocates.

These surveys have dealt with the basic parameters of public consent in America for federal regulation in setting and enforcing standards that can make highway and auto travel safer. As with earlier waves, this year's survey covers a broad spectrum of issues, including how important Americans feel the role of government should be in setting standards and improving consumer information about motor vehicle safety. Some of the key findings of the latest public opinion survey are:

### **Strong Mandate for Federal Role in Highway and Auto Safety**

By a sound majority, 91% of Americans strongly support a strong federal government role in setting uniform highway and auto safety standards. As in preceding polls, the percent of those who feel federal involvement is “very important” is greatest among women, minorities and adults over the age of 30.

### **Broad Support for Rollover Standard to Prevent or Reduce Injuries**

Each year, crashes involving the rollover of vehicles result in more than 10,000 deaths, representing about one fourth of all deaths from motor vehicles. Unfortunately, no government regulations exist to prevent rollover in passenger vehicles, including SUVs. Also, regulations to protect occupants in rollover crashes when they do happen are weak and decades-old.

- *Overall, a 6 to 1 majority of the public (84% to 13%) express the view that “the government should create safety rules that require manufacturers to make all passenger vehicles including SUVs more stable and less likely to roll over.”*

- ***Significantly, 85% of SUV owners are aware of the rollover problem, and favor such government action by 82% to 14%.***
- ***86% of the American people say they are familiar with the SUV rollover problem.***
- ***Only 31% are aware of a government website that has contains customer information about how likely it is for various types of vehicles to roll over.***
- ***83% to 14% favor requiring stickers to be placed on the windshield of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over.***

Another innovation tested in the survey is Electronic Stability Control (“ESC”) devices that in certain circumstances can help prevent vehicle rollovers. ***A 55% to 39% majority nationwide favors the government requiring ESC devices to be installed in new cars in the future.***

### **Broad Based Support on other Safety Measures**

Three other measures that received strong public support were:

- 1) Improved Seatbelts--***An 82% to 17% majority nationwide would like to see the government require improvements in seat belts to better protect passengers during rollovers.***
- 2) Stronger Roof Standard--***An 83% majority “wants the government to require a major upgrading of roof safety standards to withstand the weight of the car when it rolls over.”***
- 3) Mismatched Collisions between SUVs and Smaller Cars--***Among the public as a whole, 83% are concerned about the damage caused when SUVs collide with smaller vehicles.***

### **Preventing Passenger Ejection**

The issue of passenger ejection received broad-based support. Not only do Americans favor action by the federal government to set better standards, but they also strongly support installation of safety features that could help prevent passenger ejection:

- ***A 72% to 24% majority believes “the government should set standards for auto manufacturers to prevent people from being ejected from motor vehicles in crashes.”***
- ***81% favor “stronger vehicle roofs so that windshields don’t pop out of the frame so easily during a crash.”***
- ***81% support safer door locks and latches so that doors to not fly open in crashes.***
- ***78% also favor “stronger side door window glass, like that in windshields, that won’t crumble in a crash.”***
- ***70% support “side air bag curtains that drop from the vehicle roof and come between the person and the side door and window.”***
- ***85% favor “the government requiring better seat belts to prevent people from being ejected in crashes.”***

## **Making Safety Improvements Mandatory and Willingness to Pay More for Them**

More than two out of three Americans (72%) said that safety features should be offered as standard equipment on all motor vehicles.

Survey respondents were asked how much more money they would be willing to pay for vehicle safety improvements that would prevent rollovers, provide better roof crush protection, and upgrade side impact protection. ***Back in 1996, 75% of the people said they would pay the extra money. Now, in 2004, fully 91% said they would pay \$200 to \$300 more for safety improvements.***

## **Addressing Auto Safety Concerns for Children**

With motor vehicle crashes the leading cause of death for our children, survey respondents indicated substantial support for improved automobile safety for children.

**Improved Child Safety Seats.** *A substantial 79% to 14% majority believes a permanent fold-out seat built into the back seats would be more convenient and easier to use than the separate seat they now have to attach for themselves.*

**Eliminating Blind Spots.** *An overwhelming 90% of the American people would like to have some type of equipment in their new car to provide better visibility directly behind the vehicle and decrease the likelihood of backing over children.*

**Making it Illegal to Leave Children Alone in Parked Cars.** *Ninety percent (90%) of the public would favor state laws that would make it illegal for any parent to leave a child alone in a parked vehicle.*

In addition to state laws, the survey respondents were asked about their support for the installation of technology in vehicles, such as a buzzer that would alert the driver when a child is left in the back seat.

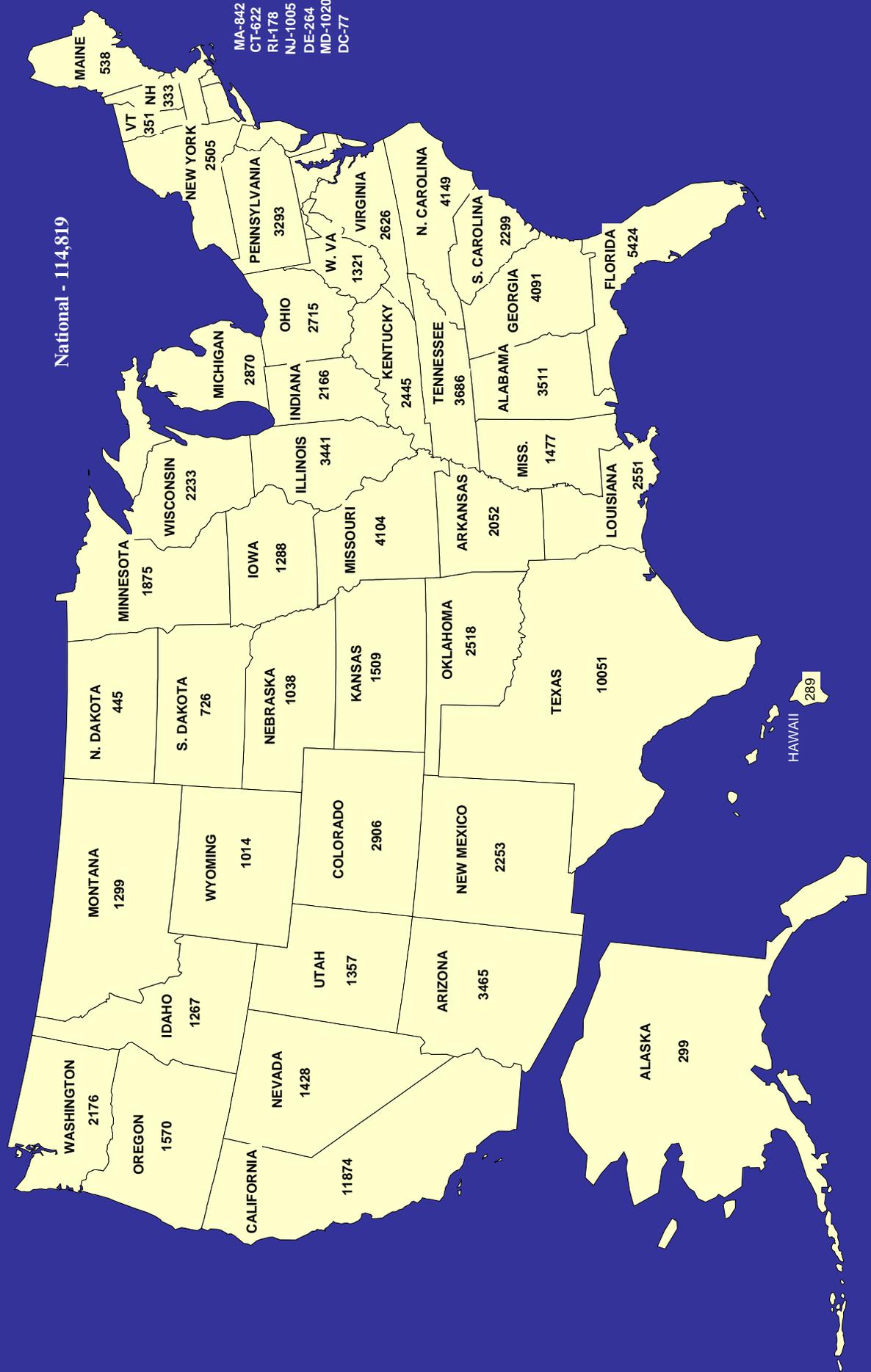
- An 82% to 17% majority would favor the installation of such a warning device.

## The Problem of Trucks and Highway Safety

This year's survey examined the following issues:

- **Truck Driver Fatigue.** *An 84% to 13% majority of the public favors the mandatory installation of black boxes on all trucks, which can enforce hours of service rules. This would cut down on drivers attempting to increase the number of hours they drive above legal limits.*
- **Bigger, Heavier Truck Loads.** *By 77% to 16%, the public opposes increasing truck weight limits. The 2004 survey continues to show a large majority of the public opposing increases in truck weight limits and allowing bigger rigs to share the road.*
- **Multiple Trailers.** *80% of the public says trucks with two or more trailers are less safe.*

# Rollover Deaths 1991-2002 by State



Data Source: National Center for Statistics & Analysis. Occupants of Passenger Vehicles Killed in Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes by State, Rollover Occurrence and Vehicle Type FARS 1991-2001 and 2002 ARF. U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington D.C., Data Request (Rollover Fatalities 2000-2002 by State).