

## Enhance Auto Safety

Automotive safety is the primary mission of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). In recent decades, however, NHTSA’s mission has increasingly become distorted by political correctness and environmental agendas. For example, the agency has focused on the alleged safety hazards of sport utility vehicles while paying little attention to the safety risks of subcompact cars. Moreover, NHTSA has moved to mandate safety features that are already becoming widely adopted due to consumer demand, such as electronic stability control systems. Such mandates end up limiting design flexibility and constitute little more than an exercise of regulatory muscle.

One major NHTSA program actually increases traffic deaths by significantly reducing vehicle crashworthiness. The agency’s auto fuel economy standards, known as CAFE (for corporate average fuel economy), force vehi-

cles to be downsized in order to boost miles per gallon. Downsized vehicles have less mass to absorb collision forces and less interior space in which to safeguard passengers. As a result, CAFE causes several thousand additional traffic deaths per year in the name of saving gasoline. Several years ago the agency reformed CAFE to reduce its downsizing incentive, but this reform is now being overwhelmed as the Obama administration seeks ever higher—and therefore more lethal—fuel economy standards. Unbelievably, 62 mpg is now under study as a possible target for 2025. Congress should halt any increases in CAFE standards. At a minimum, NHTSA should undertake a comprehensive study of the deaths attributable to CAFE, both on a yearly basis and over its 30-year history.

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