

importance of crashworthiness<sup>1</sup> and crash avoidance<sup>2</sup> features for a vehicle. The study recognized that, for the foreseeable future, summary measures of crashworthiness and crash avoidance must be presented separately due to differences in current levels of knowledge, and differences in the roles of vehicle and driver in the two areas. For the immediate future, the NAS study recommended that the agency develop a summary measure of a vehicle's crashworthiness that incorporates quantitative information supplemented with the professional judgment of automotive experts, statisticians, and decision analysts. According to the recommendation, NHTSA should provide information with this measure to reflect the range of uncertainty in those judgments. For crash avoidance, the study recommended the development of a checklist of features for the near future.

In our 1997 Request for Comments, we said we would study the possibility of combining frontal NCAP and side impact NCAP ratings into a single rating, as a first step toward a summary crashworthiness rating. We requested comments on a number of possible approaches to exploring the NAS study recommendation that a comprehensive crashworthiness rating be developed. These approaches included:

- A Federal Advisory Committee to develop a method that the agency or others could use to "rate" new vehicles. Such method would indicate what quantitative information should be used (both from NHTSA and from other sources), how such information should be combined, and how such information would be supplemented with expert judgement.

<sup>1</sup> Crashworthiness refers to a vehicle's ability to protect occupants from serious injury or death when a crash occurs.

<sup>2</sup> Crash avoidance refers to a vehicle's ability to prevent a crash from occurring.

- A negotiated rulemaking under which NHTSA would agree to propose a new consumer information regulation.

- Development of a standard means by which manufacturers would establish the degree to which a specific vehicle make/model exceeded the minimum requirements in the safety standards.

We also indicated that we believed the development of some comparative crash avoidance information was possible.

Commenters on the 1997 Request for Comments indicated little support for combining the frontal NCAP and side impact NCAP scores into a single rating. They expressed concerns about the compatibility of the two ratings programs, since frontal NCAP scores cannot be combined across weight classes, while side impact NCAP scores can. As a result, we did not pursue this option any further.

Commenters also expressed concern about other aspects of the NAS study recommendation for a summary rating. In particular, commenters generally did not support the use of expert judgment to supplement gaps in available quantitative information.

Since the publication of the 1997 Request for Comments, we have greatly expanded the scope of information that consumers can use to evaluate the relative safety of new vehicles. Ratings are available for not only front and side impact crashworthiness, but also rollover resistance. Additional ratings are under development for dynamic rollover, braking and lighting. Information on safety features in the "Buying a Safer Car" brochure has expanded from four features with the first issue to 22 features in the 2002 issue. Information on an additional four features is available on NHTSA's website, which has been greatly expanded and improved since the 1997 Request for Comments. In addition, the brochure and web site provide information on the importance of

vehicle weight and on the relative rate of occurrence of front and side crashes to help consumers weigh the relative importance of the available information without a summary rating.

With the introduction of Rollover Resistance Ratings in 2001, we once again began looking at the idea of a summary rating, to see if the addition of this quantitative information would address some of the commenter concerns from 1997. However, with Congress' mandate to conduct research on a dynamic rollover rating to supplement the Rollover Resistance Ratings, we decided to postpone beginning work on a possible summary rating until after that research was completed. Until we finish research on dynamic rollover, braking and lighting, we will not return to consideration of a summary rating.

While we may develop a summary rating in the future, it will not be in the context of the 1981 proposal. Any summary rating that might be developed would be vastly different than what would have been done under that proposal. First, it would likely include consideration of factors beyond crash protection. Second, such a rating would be developed and distributed by NHTSA rather than by vehicle manufacturers. Consumer research conducted over the years indicates that consumers are more likely to take into consideration safety information provided by a neutral party, with the government being regarded as a source that is unbiased and trustworthy.

For all of the reasons discussed above, we are terminating the 1981 proposed rulemaking for a vehicle crashworthiness performance ratings program.

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