

the advanced air bag features on the warning label, we believe vehicle owners will be more likely to heed the final bullet on the label, which is to consult their owner's manual for full details about the advanced air bag system.

We have decided against adding the "12 and under" qualifier because we believe the qualifier has served its originally intended purpose, which was to educate the public to the size of occupant that may be at risk from an air bag deployment. We will continue to use the qualifier in our educational literature, and continue to believe it is a useful tool for helping distinguish those particularly at risk, but have chosen in the interest of brevity and clarity to make reference to "children" on the sun-visor label rather than "children 12 and under."

We are granting GM's request that the new label not be required until September 1, 2003, the first day of the phase-in implementing the advanced air bag requirements. This should provide vehicle manufacturers sufficient time to order and install the new labels without penalizing them for early compliance with the advanced air bag requirements. The current label will be allowed for vehicles certified to the advanced air bag requirements before September 1, 2003, although vehicle manufacturers may choose to use the new label depicted in Figure 11 on those vehicles under the existing provision allowing early compliance.

As discussed above, the Alliance seeks reinstatement of a prohibition against supplemental air bag information on sun visors and the adoption of a prohibition against such information anywhere in the occupant compartment. The Alliance argues that these actions are necessary to prevent problems of dilution of message and information overload. It argues further that these problems are as large today as they were in the mid-late 1990s at the height of the air bag injury problem.

The question of whether information overload may tend to dilute the message should be considered in light of changing technology and maturing communication needs. In the rulemakings addressing the air bags of the mid 1990s, the agency focused on the twin messages of moving away from air bags and properly using seat belts and other restraints. In considering what messages should be placed on the label, the Agency recognized that, from the point of view of occupant behavior, all airbag systems of that generation operated similarly. Vehicle occupants could not control how or whether an air bag would deploy, but could control

whether they were properly seated within the vehicle and properly restrained.

The messages of the 1990s remain critical. The incorporation of technologies to minimize the risks of air bags to occupants should not detract from the primary message that proper occupant seating and restraint use are the most critical factors in minimizing air bag induced injuries. However, the communication needs surrounding advanced air bags, while including the same needs as before, also involve additional complexities. The advent of advanced air bag technology may include air bag systems that respond differently based on the location or characteristics of a particular occupant. While the owner's manuals should contain detailed descriptions of each particular airbag system and how an occupant can best utilize it, the Agency remains convinced that there is benefit to permitting such information to be visible to occupants while riding in the vehicle.

In the December 2001 final rule we tried to balance the potential need for additional design-specific information with the possibility of confusion by prohibiting labels with the potential to confuse or mislead a consumer when read in conjunction with the required label. The Alliance argues that the balance we tried to strike eliminates or reduces the benefits of consistency and repeated exposure that led us originally to mandate particular words and format and to avoid the possibility of diluting these important messages through too many or differing messages.

We agree that a better balance can be struck. While the prohibition against potentially confusing or misleading labels remains, we will continue to permit manufacturers to add design specific information to their sun visor labels. However, to avoid the possibility of information overload, manufacturers must first seek the Agency's approval and may place additional design specific information on the label only after the Agency has granted them permission to do so.

We have set up a procedure under which a vehicle manufacturer can ask for agency authorization to add specific language to the required sun visor warning label addressing the air bag system's unique features. The agency will only authorize or reject the label submitted by the manufacturer. It will not make any judgment as to whether one or more of a variety of labels best prevents information overload, or whether the new information best addresses a particular air bag risk, and it will not suggest alternative language

if it rejects a manufacturer's request. Moreover, the agency will not verify or vouch for the accuracy of the information. The agency decision will be limited to a determination that the additional information is not confusing or misleading when the entire label is read as a whole and does not result in information overload; that is to say, the label is not conveying so much information that it is unlikely to be read or taken seriously. We believe this procedure will allow for the provision of design-specific warnings without diminishing the label's effectiveness due to information overload.

In order to obtain NHTSA's authorization, the manufacturer's proposal must meet the following criteria:

- The information that would be added must be design-specific and not applicable to all or most air bag systems;
- The additional information must address situations in which foreseeable occupant behavior can affect air bag performance; and
- The manufacturer's request must provide a mock-up of the label with the specific language that would be added to the label.

Although this procedure places a burden on the agency to determine what constitutes information overload, we believe it will allow us to control the potential for information overload without substituting our judgment for the manufacturer's as to what information vis-à-vis a particular system is most important or germane. Because the information will be specific to the implementation of a particular air bag system in a particular vehicle, and not applicable to all or most airbag systems, we do not believe public comment would be helpful or necessary before making the determination.

The Alliance also requests that we further prohibit any other labels or information elsewhere in the interior compartment of the vehicle. Standard No. 208 has not historically contained any such express prohibition. This lack has not led to increasing numbers of labels and confusing messages, perhaps because the question of whether labels could be placed elsewhere in the vehicle had not been debated. While we do not today extend the prohibition throughout the occupant compartment, should information overload from such additional labels threaten to become a problem, we may reconsider this decision.

The procedure through which additional information can be placed on the sun visor label does not apply to additional labels or information placed elsewhere in the interior of the vehicle.