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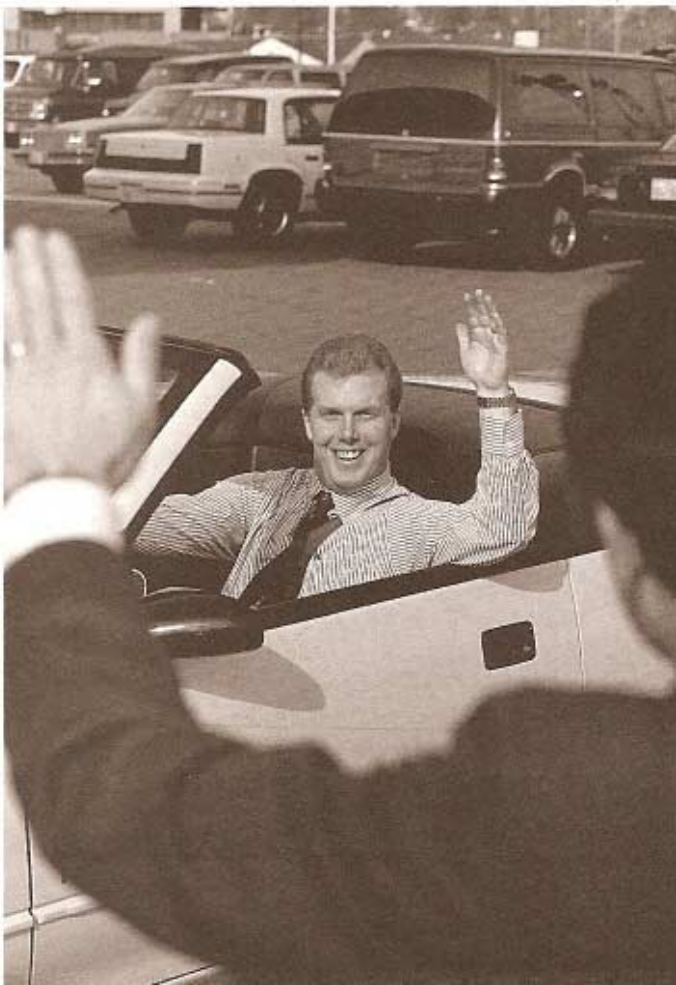
Delivering the Safety That Comes with the Car



NADA MANAGEMENT SERIES

Delivering the Safety That Comes with the Car

Table of Contents

Published by the National Automobile Dealers Association
8400 Westpark Drive, McLean, VA 22102

Delivering the Safety That Comes with the Car

I. THE ISSUE: VEHICLE SAFETY

You've sold the car, completed the paperwork and now you're about to deliver it to a customer who can hardly wait to take it out on the road. Whether it's new or used, fully loaded or the basic model, a new car generates excitement unrivaled by most other consumer purchases. The delivery is your opportunity to share that excitement, answer any questions your customers may have, and show them how to use the features that contributed to their decision to buy. Increasingly, those features include safety measures designed to protect the driver and passengers.

Some of the newest safety features aren't even visible to the people they protect. For example, many manufacturers are adding extra structural reinforcement or energy-absorbing foam to side panels to protect passengers involved in side-impact collisions. Air bags are collapsed behind their panels. Those anti-lock brakes are "down there somewhere" and many new owners figure that's all they need to know. Unfortunately, there's a lot more to these "hidden" safety features than most folks realize, and it's amazing how many misconceptions exist about what they can and cannot do.

In an effort to clear up some of those misconceptions, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has asked dealers and sales personnel to take an active part in promoting highway safety. NADA is providing this guide to highlight the major areas of concern.

II. THE PROBLEM: MISINFORMATION

"But it's all in the owner's manual!" True. Most safety features developed for a particular car are fully explained in the owner's manual. Unfortunately, few car buyers rush right home from the dealership and sit down with a cup of coffee and the manual. More likely, they have a few errands to run, a friend or relative to visit -- anything that keeps them out and about in their new car. Even those with good intentions find that reading the manual drops further down the priority list as the days and weeks wear on. Once comfortable with the car, owners tend to use the manual only when they need it for specific information, like resetting the clock or checking the maintenance schedule.

According to NHTSA, many drivers just don't know enough about the vehicles they drive. To salespeople who have a thorough understanding of the products they sell, some common consumer misconceptions may be hard to believe, but among the general public, information about new features tends to spread quickly by word of mouth and is often accompanied by a loss of accuracy. Take these, for example:

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"With a driver's side air bag I don't have to wear my seat belt."
"I don't drive in bad weather, so I don't need anti-lock brakes."
"My sport utility has 4-wheel drive -- I can turn on a dime at any speed."
"The stopping distance is shorter with anti-lock brakes."

Those statements were made by the same people who share the road with you. Don't you wish someone could set them straight?

III. THE SOLUTION: DELIVERING SAFETY

As major players in the transportation industry, automobile salespeople are in a unique position to inform and educate those who will drive the vehicles they sell. Think about it. You take the time to build rapport with your customers, find out what they need in a vehicle, present the right options and select the right car. The relationship becomes relaxed and friendly as customers realize you want them to be happy with their purchase. Your concern for their safety can only improve on that.

Often, some discussion of safety occurs during the sale. For instance, you may need to explain the advantages of air bags or anti-lock brakes. But explaining the advantages doesn't necessarily tell the customer the specifics of how these features should be used or what to expect when they use them. That comes later, after the customer has decided on a vehicle. Who better to explain the purpose and proper use of safety features than someone who knows the vehicle top to bottom, front to back? And what better time to do it than at delivery?

IV. THE CONCERNS

Just how much time will it take to properly explain the safety features? Surprisingly little. The number of items you cover will depend on the vehicle and its particular features, but for most people your presentation will be limited to four concerns:

- Safety Belts
- Air Bags
- Anti-lock Brakes
- Child Safety Seats

For certain individuals, other information will also apply:

- Sport Utility Vehicles
- Cellular Phones

A. Safety Belts

Safety belts have long been standard equipment in U.S. cars and have proven to be the single best protection available to both drivers and passengers. Because they have been required for so long, a wide variety of belts exists. The type used in any one vehicle depends not only on the manufacturer, but on the age of the vehicle as well, and the salesperson should be thoroughly familiar with the proper use of the safety belts that come with any vehicle he/she sells.

The oldest form of safety belt is the lap belt, designed to hold the occupant's lower torso in position by fastening snugly across the pelvis. Few vehicles on the road today are equipped with laps belts alone. The shoulder belt, meant to be used in conjunction with the lap belt, was developed to secure the occupant's upper torso by crossing the chest diagonally from the shoulder to the hip.

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In the late 1980's federal mandates for passive protection in the front seat led many automakers to install *automatic belts* in lieu of the more expensive air bag. Some automatic belts fasten at two points on the door and one point on the seat. Many are not truly automatic because the occupant can unfasten them for more ease getting in and out of the car. At that point, the belts become manually operated restraints. *Warning: Do not disengage passive restraints in your dealership vehicles. By federal law, passive restraints must be properly engaged at all times during the display/demonstration of vehicles offered for sale.*

Other passive restraints include automatic, door-mounted shoulder belts that slide into place when the door is closed and motorized shoulder belts which slide along a track above the door and move into place when the vehicle is turned on. Both must be used with a manual lap belt to prevent "submarining" or sliding down under the shoulder belt during a collision. Unfortunately, many people ignore the lap belt.

Many recent models have manual, three-point belts in addition to front air bags. New features, such as an adjustable shoulder harness that permits passengers to adjust the angle of the shoulder belt for a better and more comfortable fit, and belt webbing grabbers which lock the belt in place at the reel whenever they detect a sudden movement of the vehicle, offer maximum passenger comfort while still providing the necessary collision protection. But, like all other belt systems, they only work if you use them properly.

B. Air Bags/ Supplemental Restraint Systems (SRS)

Supplemental restraint systems, more commonly known as air bags, offer some variety also. Your customer's new vehicle may have a driver side air bag or dual front air bags. Certain vehicles may have side air bags as well. Some manufacturers are introducing an *air bank*, a larger air bag designed to protect not only the driver or door-side passenger, but someone who may be riding in the middle of a three-passenger front seat. In model year 1998, driver and front passenger air bags will be required as standard equipment on all cars. In model year 1999 they will be required on all vans, light trucks and sport utility vehicles as well.

Front air bags are designed to protect the driver/passengers in the front seat of a vehicle in front-end collisions occurring at speeds of over 15 mph. They do not protect rear seat passengers or occupants involved in side impact collisions.

Side impact protection, designed to protect front and rear occupants in a 30 mph side impact crash, is required by federal regulation on 25 percent of model year 1995 cars. It will be mandatory on *all* passenger vehicles in model year 1997. Manufacturers can comply with the regulations by choosing one of the following options: air bags mounted in the door panel or the seat; extra structural reinforcement; or energy-absorbing foam.

In any discussion of air bags or side impact protection, two points should be stressed:

1. *Neither air bags nor additional side protection are a substitute for the safety belt*. They are meant to be used with the safety belt. The belt system keeps the occupant of the vehicle in the

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right position to take advantage of air bag/side protection and prevents ejection from the vehicle during the accident. Moreover, the risk of collision-related injuries in vehicles equipped with air bags is actually increased if the occupants do not wear their safety belts, and the severity of the injuries is often more serious.

2. *Rear-facing child safety seats should never be used in front seats with passenger-side air bags*. The force with which the air bag is deployed could put too much pressure on the safety seat and cause severe injury to the child.

C. Anti-lock Braking System (ABS)

Considered by many to be the most significant safety feature developed since the safety belt, anti-lock brakes can prevent wheel lock and subsequent skids or spin-outs during sudden stops and under slippery road conditions. When used properly, they automatically perform the brake-pumping function that drivers would otherwise have to do themselves, and they do it faster, pumping several times per second. This permits the driver to concentrate solely on steering around the obstacle or away from the dangerous situation.

Unfortunately, most drivers have been conditioned to pump brakes manually in cars without ABS, and they are likely to do so out of habit even with ABS. This confuses the computerized sensor in the system and prevents the system from performing as it should. In addition, most drivers do not realize that they will actually feel the automatic pumping of the ABS through the brake pedal. Drivers should be told to expect a pulsing sensation in the brake pedal when their anti-lock brakes are pumping, and they should be cautioned not to pump the brakes themselves. Advise customers to practice using their anti-lock brakes in non-emergency situations so they can develop confidence in the system and become accustomed to letting the ABS do the work.

What *can't* anti-lock brakes do? The worst piece of misinformation to reach the public about anti-lock brakes is the idea that they can help you stop in a shorter distance. Stopping distance depends on how fast you're going and the weight of the vehicle. With or without anti-lock brakes, vehicles of similar weight driving at the same speed need the same distance for stopping.

D. Child Safety Seats

During the course of your sales presentation, you should find out whether the vehicle will be used to transport children, and if so, their approximate ages. For vehicle owners with infants or small children, safety seats are always an issue. But a discussion of safety seats should not be limited to parents of young children. At one time or another most drivers are called upon to transport a young relative, or the child of a neighbor or a friend. Child safety seats are required by law in all 50 states, and a child who is not properly restrained in a vehicle is in danger of sustaining serious, even fatal, injuries.

Only those seats which carry a label (dated *after* January 1, 1981) stating that they meet all federal safety requirements should be considered. Safety seats generally fall into one of four categories:

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- *Infant Seats*

  These are designed to be used from birth to one year and about 20 lbs. and are always installed facing the rear of the vehicle.
  Caution: Due to the force with which air bags are deployed, rear-facing child safety seats should never be used in the front seat of vehicles with passenger-side air bags. The air bag could put too much force on the safety seat and cause injury to the child.

- *Convertible Seats*

  Designed to be used by children from birth to about 4 years/ 40 lbs., they are used in a rear facing position for infants, and can be turned to face front once the child reaches one year and at least 20 lbs. The harness strap must be place in the lower slots when rear-facing and in the upper slots when facing forward.

- *Booster Seats*

  These are designed for children who have outgrown their convertible seat and are best for children from 40-60 lbs. Some are equipped with a small shield. Others are belt-positioning boosters which allow safe use of the lap and shoulder belts that come with the car, provided they are positioned properly on the child.

- *Built-in Child Seats*

  Some cars come equipped with child seats that fold down from the back of the rear passenger seats. If you sell such a model, tell the customer the recommended size of children for whom the seats were designed (either 20-40 lbs. or 40-60 lbs.) and properly demonstrate their use and the safety belt system. If additional protection is required, (e.g., an infant safety seat until the child is large enough to use the one that comes with the car) be sure to explain that to your customer.

The best place for a child safety seat or booster seat is in the back of the vehicle. In many vehicles, the safety belt system requires some modification to accommodate a child seat. Check the owner's manual to learn what type of modification, if any, is necessary for the vehicles you sell. Any information concerning safety belt modification or recommended child seats should be passed on to the customer.

Note: Some manuals recommend a top tether strap for added protection, but this generally has more to do with the fact that the vehicles are also sold in Canada where the top tether strap is mandatory. U.S. owners should not expect to find top tether straps on seats sold in this country. Currently only

one child safety seat manufacturer offers this feature as an option in the U.S. To be sure the child seat fits properly, use the simple test mentioned below.

Not all child seats fit all vehicles. If customers already have a child safety seat, they should bring it with them to make sure it fits and can be installed in the new vehicle according to the seat manufacturer's instructions. A simple test for fit should be conducted on any child safety seat before it is actually used. After installing the seat, you should attempt to move it from side to side and try to tip it down and forward toward the front of the vehicle. If it still moves after securing it as tightly as possible, it will not adequately protect the child.

E. Sport Utility Vehicles

Utility vehicles are designed to be driven on or off paved roads. Those that weigh 8,500 pounds or less are called *sport utility vehicles.* Most utility vehicles have 4-wheel drive and can handle surface conditions that other vehicles can't, such as snow, ice, sand, mud, or extremely steep grades where extra traction is required. A common misconception on the part of drivers new to 4-wheel drive is that the added traction will allow them a shorter stopping distance. This simply is not the case. As noted above, stopping distance is determined by the weight of the vehicle and the speed at which it is driven. Given the same driving speed, a sport utility which is heavier than the customer's previous car will require a greater stopping distance.

All sport utility vehicles carry a required warning sticker: "This is a multipurpose vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car." What the customer needs to know is *why* and *how* it's different. Utility vehicles usually have higher ground clearance and/or a shorter wheelbase or narrower tire track width. While those features are beneficial in rough terrain, they also contribute to a higher center of gravity. For this reason, utility vehicles cannot take corners at the same top speeds as passenger cars. They are prone to rollover if not driven properly. As with all vehicles, safety belt use is imperative, and the driver should be made aware of the specific driving precautions and recommendations outlined in the owner's manual.

F. Cellular Phones

As car phones become increasingly popular, many customers are looking to dealerships for sales and installation. If you provide such services, you can also impart information that will teach the consumer to use the phone without compromising safety. As with auto safety features, a lot of information is provided in pamphlets that come with the phone, but consumers don't always get into the finer aspects of operation. Explanations of speed dialing, voice mail/message features, hands-free microphones -- anything that helps the driver keep both hands on the wheel -- are bound to improve safety, not only for the person using the phone, but for everyone else on the road.

V. BENEFITS

Safety benefits the dealership too. If you're concerned that a safety presentation will take too much time, consider this: The customer who leaves your dealership today with no understanding of anti-lock brakes could return fearful and angry six months later because the brakes "started doing something weird" when he/she tried to stop suddenly. Similarly, bad feelings can be generated in a customer who purchases a car for family use only to find out it can't accommodate a safety seat. Be sure you know which cars on your lot were meant to be used as family vehicles.

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Your concern for your customers' safety is an important step in the development of a positive, long-term relationship between the dealership and the consumer. In addition to providing an obvious benefit to your customers, a presentation of safety precautions at the time of delivery can lead to repeat business and referrals. Use the safety checklist that follows as a reminder of the features you should highlight at delivery.

VI. SAFETY CHECKLIST

Safety Belts

❒ The salesperson should know how to use the safety belt system for any vehicle he/she sells. Complete information is provided in the owner's manual. When you deliver the car, fully explain the proper use of safety belts, including the correct way to adjust and fasten them for a snug, secure fit. Include the following information when applicable:

- ***All customers***

  For the best safety belt protection, the seat back should be in the upright position, and the complete safety belt system should be used at all times. The lap belt holds the lower torso in place and prevents the body from "submarining" (sliding out from under the shoulder belt) in an accident. It should fit snugly across the pelvis from hip to hip and should not be worn across the abdomen. The shoulder belt holds the upper torso in place. It should cross the chest diagonally from the collar bone to the opposite hip. It should never cross the face or the neck.

  Until a child is large enough to wear both the shoulder and lap parts of the safety belt system, he/she should remain in a booster seat. By nature, children wiggle and cannot be depended upon to wear a lap belt properly, i.e., low and snug across thepelvic area. Lap belts worn incorrectly have been known to cause serious spinal and abdominal injuries.

- ***Pregnant customers***

  An unborn child's safety is dependent upon the safety of the mother. Women should continue to wear safety belts during pregnancy, keeping the lap belt low and under the abdomen.

Air Bags/SRS

❒ Show the customer where they are located.

❒ Explain their function:

Air bags provide additional protection during a collision. You do not need to do anything to activate your air bag(s). Front air bags will inflate automatically in the event of a front end collision occurring at speeds of over 15 miles per hour. Similarly, side air bags will inflate during a side impact accident. Air bags deflate as soon as they have served their purpose so that your vision and your ability to maneuver your car are not obstructed.

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❒ Explain their proper use:

Air bags alone do not offer adequate collision protection. Drivers and passengers must also use the vehicle's safety belt system in order to benefit from the added protection air bags provide.

Never use a rear-facing child safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag. As the air bag deploys, it may exert too much force on the seat and seriously injure the child. The safest place for any young child or child safety seat is in the back seat of the vehicle.

❒ Explain proper maintenance:

Your vehicle is equipped with an internal diagnostic system that self-checks your air bags. When your turn on the ignition the SRS light on your dashboard should go on for a few seconds while this check is performed. If one of the following situations occurs, you should have your air bag system checked by a qualified service technician:

- *The SRS light does not come on when you turn on the ignition.*
- *The SRS light stays on after the engine starts.*
- *The SRS light comes on or flashes while you are driving.*

Once your air bag has deployed, it must be replaced by a new unit. Your collision insurance will cover the cost of replacement.

Anti-lock Braking System (ABS)

❒ Explain what they can and cannot do:

Anti-lock brakes are designed to prevent wheel lock during panic stops and under hazardous road conditions. They do not shorten the distance required for stopping. As with all other vehicles, drivers should maintain a safe distance from vehicles in front of them.

❒ Explain how they feel:

When you use your anti-lock brakes on slippery roads or in a panic stop, you will feel a pulsing sensation through the brake pedal. This is normal and means your brakes are automatically pumping as they should.

❒ Explain proper use:

- *Press the brake pedal to the floor and hold as long as necessary.*

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- *If you are trying to avoid an obstacle, steer around it while holding the brake pedal down.*

- *Do not pump the brakes. That action confuses the computerized system and can prevent the brakes from performing properly.*

❒ Suggest that the customer practice using anti-lock brakes:

On a deserted stretch of dry road or an empty parking lot, practice a panic stop at 40 mph. After you have become comfortable with the feel of the braking system, try braking and steering around an obstacle. Familiarity with the brakes will lessen the chance of using them incorrectly in an emergency.

Child Safety Seats

❒ If the vehicle is equipped with self-contained child seats, explain the age and size of the child for whom they are recommended and the proper use of the safety belt system. Be sure to let the customer know if a separate safety seat must be used to accommodate a smaller/younger child.

❒ If the safety belt system must be modified to accommodate a child safety seat, explain the vehicle manufacturer's recommended procedure for doing so. Often the modification hardware is available from the manufacturer at no cost to the customer. It's wise to have a reasonable supply of such parts on hand in your store so you can provide them immediately. If necessary, arrange dealer installation of the seat belt modification indicated in the owner's manual.

❒ Be sure to pass on these general safety tips for customers who transport young children:

- *The safest place for any child to ride is in the back seat.*

- *Rear-facing child safety seats should never be used in front seats with passenger-side air bags.*

- *Before purchasing a child safety seat or using one you already have, try it out in your new vehicle to make sure it fits properly and can be installed according to the safety seat manufacturer's instructions and the owner's manual instructions.*

- *Use only a safety seat which meets current federal safety standards. These are identified by a label which reads, "This child restraint system conforms to all applicable Federal motor vehicle safety standards."*

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Sport Utility Vehicles

❒ Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the safety precautions and driving suggestions presented by the manufacturer in the owner's manual. Take some time to explain them to the new owner. In particular, be sure to address the following issues:

❒ Center of Gravity

The higher ground clearance that permits you to drive this vehicle in a variety of on and off-road conditions, such as in snow, mud, sand, etc., also gives it a higher center of gravity. This vehicle is not designed to corner at the same top speeds as passenger cars. Sharp turns or sudden maneuvers could result in loss of control and/or vehicle rollover. Please give yourself some time to get used to handling your new vehicle. Always slow down and exercise caution on turns and maneuvers. As with all vehicles, drive carefully, obey speed limits and, whether driving on or off road, always wear your seat belt.

❒ 4-Wheel Drive

For maximum safety and vehicle performance, please take the following precautions:

- *Never use your vehicle in the 4-wheel drive mode on dry, hard-surfaced roads. It isn't necessary and doing so puts extra wear on tires, decreases fuel economy, and makes disengagement of the 4-wheel drive mode difficult.*

- *The added traction of 4-wheel drive does not affect your required stopping distance. Stopping distance is related to the speed and weight of the vehicle. If this vehicle is heavier than the one you drove previously, it will require a longer stopping distance. Allow plenty of distance between your vehicle and the one in front of it, and exercise extreme caution when coming to a stop.*

- *Under slippery conditions, your stopping distance will be even greater. Engage your 4-wheel drive, decrease your speed, and give yourself more room to stop.*

Cellular Phones

❒ Emphasize the importance of using cellular phones safely. The following tips are suggested by the Safety Council of the Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA):

- *Safe driving is your first priority. Always buckle up, keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.*

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- *Make sure your phone is positioned where it is easy to see and easy to reach. Become familiar with the operation of your phone so you're comfortable using it on the road.*

- *Use a hands-free microphone while driving. For the best possible sound quality, have your phone dealer-installed.*

- *Use the speed dialing feature for frequently called numbers. This allows you to make your call by pressing only one or two buttons. Most phones will store up to 99 numbers.*

- *Without the speed dialing feature, dial only when stopped. If you can't stop or pull over, dial a few digits, survey traffic, then continue dialing. Better yet, have a passenger dial.*

- *Never take notes while driving. Pull off the road to jot something down. Many mobile phones have an electronic scratchpad that allows you to key in a new phone number while having a conversation.*

- *Let your wireless network's voice mail pick up your call when it's inconvenient or unsafe to answer the car phone. You can also use your voice mail to leave yourself reminders.*

- *Be a cellular Samaritan. Dialing 911 is a free call for cellular subscribers. Use it to report accidents, drunk driving, crimes in progress or other potentially life-threatening emergencies.*

RESOURCES

The organizations listed below have a strong interest in promoting traffic safety and provide information/literature for distribution to your customers. For further information, contact:

NADA
Communications Group
8400 Westpark Drive
McLean, VA 22102
(800) 252-NADA
(703) 827-7407

NADA Communications publishes the Consumer Education Series, a collection of informative brochures you can provide to your customers. Topics include safety, car-buying and vehicle service.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
400 Seventh St., SW
Washington, DC 20590
(800) 424-9393 NHTSA Hotline
(202) 366-0123 (in Washington, DC)

NHTSA has an Auto Safety Hotline which provides free information about crash test results, auto recalls, tires, child safety seats, and seat belts. The hotline also encourages consumers to report potential vehicle and/or accessory safety problems. You are free to copy and provide to your customers any safety information you receive from NHTSA.

National Safety Council
Order Department
P.O. Box 558
Itasca, IL 60143-0558
(800) 621-7619

The National Safety Council publishes a 350 page Safety, Health and Environmental Resources Catalog listing all of their publications, videotapes, posters, etc. Of particular interest are the listings under traffic safety and driving supplements. You may phone to order the catalog or to request information on specific traffic safety materials you may wish to provide to your customers.

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