Members of the public should note that from the time a Notice of Proposed Rule Making is issued until the matter is no longer subject to Commission consideration or court review, all *ex parte* contacts are prohibited in Commission proceedings, such as this one, which involve channel allotments. See 47 CFR 1.1204(b) for rules governing permissible *ex parte* contacts.

For information regarding proper filing procedures for comments, see 47 CFR 1.415 and 1.420.

List of Subjects in 47 CFR Part 73

Radio broadcasting.

Federal Communications Commission.

John A Karousos,

Chief, Allocations Branch, Policy and Rules Division, Mass Media Bureau.

[FR Doc. 95–27719 Filed 11–8–95; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6712–01–F

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47 CFR Part 73

[MM Docket No. 95–167; RM–8699]

Radio Broadcasting Services; Claremore and Chelsea, OK

AGENCY: Federal Communications Commission.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: The Commission requests comments on a petition filed by Michael P. Stephens, requesting the reallotment of Channel 264A from Claremore to Chelsea, OK, and the modification of Station KTFR's permit to specify Chelsea as its community of license. The allotment of Channel 264A at Chelsea could provide the community with its first local aural transmission service and enable Station KTFR to operate with full Class A power of 6 kW. Channel 264A can be allotted to Chelsea in compliance with the Commission's minimum distance separation requirements, at coordinates 36–31–27 North Latitude; 95–26–55 West Longitude, which represents a site restriction of 2.0 kilometers (1.2 miles) southwest, to avoid a short-spacing to Station KGLC, Channel 265A, Miami, OK.

DATES: Comments must be filed on or before December 26, 1995, and reply comments on or before January 10, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Federal Communications Commission, Washington, DC 20554. In addition to filing comments with the FCC, interested parties should serve the petitioner, or its counsel or consultant, as follows: Michael P. Stephens, P.O. Box 1250, Sapulpa, OK 74067 (Petitioner).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Leslie K. Shapiro, Mass Media Bureau, (202) 418–2180.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This is a synopsis of the Commission's *Notice of Proposed Rule Making,* MM Docket No. 95–167, adopted October 24, 1995, and released November 2, 1995. The full text of this Commission decision is available for inspection and copying during normal business hours in the FCC Reference Center (Room 239), 1919 M Street, NW., Washington, DC. The complete text of this decision may also be purchased from the Commission's copy contractor, International Transcription Services, Inc., (202) 857–3800, 2100 M Street, NW., Suite 140, Washington, DC 20037.

Provisions of the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980 do not apply to this proceeding.

Members of the public should note that from the time a Notice of Proposed Rule Making is issued until the matter is no longer subject to Commission consideration or court review, all *ex parte* contacts are prohibited in Commission proceedings, such as this one, which involve channel allotments. See 47 CFR 1.1204(b) for rules governing permissible *ex parte* contacts.

For information regarding proper filing procedures for comments, see 47 CFR 1.415 and 1.420.

List of Subjects in 47 CFR Part 73

Radio broadcasting.

Federal Communications Commission.

John A Karousos,

Chief, Allocations Branch, Policy and Rules Division, Mass Media Bureau.

[FR Doc. 95–27720 Filed 11–8–95; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6712–01–F

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

49 CFR Part 571

[Docket No. 74–14; Notice 97]

RIN 2127—AG14

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Occupant Crash Protection

AGENCY: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), DOT.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: Air bags are now standard equipment in millions of passenger cars, light trucks, sport utility vehicles, and vans and widely regarded to be a noteworthy safety advance, especially in higher speed crashes. However, air bags—even air bags with a lap/shoulder belt being used—are not a cure-all for every type of injury in crashes. The agency is aware of situations in which current air bag designs have undesired side effects. These include situations in which an air bag appears to have contributed to serious injuries and even death to vehicle occupants.

This document is intended to inform the public about NHTSA's actions to minimize these adverse side effects and to invite the public to share information and views with the agency.

DATES: Comments must be received by December 26, 1995.

ADDRESSES: Comments should refer to the docket and notice number of this notice and be submitted to: Docket Section, Room 5109, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. (Docket Room hours are 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday.)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen R. Kratzke, Office of Vehicle Safety Standards, NPS–10, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. Mr. Kratzke can be reached by telephone at (202) 366–5203 or by fax at (202) 366–4329.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Air bags are being offered on more and more light vehicles (i.e., cars, pickup trucks, vans, and sport utility vehicles). A decade ago, very few vehicles offered air bags and those that did were almost exclusively expensive luxury cars. In response to public demand, nearly every 1996 model year passenger car will be equipped with dual air bags as standard equipment. Installation of air bags is being accomplished in advance of federal statutory requirements that dual air bags be provided in all 1998 and later model year cars, and all 1999 and later model year light trucks and vans.

Air bags have an impressive overall performance record. Since 1987, they are estimated to have saved 911 lives. NHTSA estimates that in 1994 alone, air bags saved 374 lives. The agency fully expects these numbers to continue to increase.

The agency emphasizes that the presence of an air bag does not mean that it is less important for occupants to use their safety belts. Air bags are supplemental restraints. The primary means of occupant restraint, the safety belt, works in all types of crashes and is particularly effective in preventing ejection, where the air bag has limited benefits. NHTSA estimates that in 1994, safety belts saved almost 9,200 lives and prevented more than 211,000 moderate

to critical injuries. The combination of wearing safety belts and having an air bag installed at a seating position provides vehicle occupants with maximum safety protection in all types of crashes.

Applying appropriate scientific techniques, NHTSA has been carefully monitoring the real world performance of air bags, including any side effects, for more than a decade. The agency published an Evaluation Plan for front-seat occupant protection in January 1990 (55 FR 1586; January 17, 1990), which calls for periodic interim analyses of effectiveness (a final evaluation of effectiveness will not be possible until after air bags have been standard equipment for some time on high production volume cars). An Interim Evaluation Report, including analyses of fatality and injury reductions, was published in June 1992. The agency also submitted a Report to Congress on this subject in November 1992. The agency's analyses indicated that air bags are producing benefits for vehicle occupants. NHTSA plans to update its interim analyses of effectiveness early in 1996.

NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA) provides comprehensive, high quality data on highway crashes. These data are used to relate human, vehicle, environmental, and roadway characteristics to crash frequency and the severity of injuries sustained in those crashes. NCSA has developed several programs for providing these data. The Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS) provides basic information on all highway crashes in the U.S. in which one or more people die of their injuries within 30 days of a crash. The National Accident Sampling System (NASS) provides information from investigations of a statistical sample of police reported crashes at all levels of injury severity. As part of NASS, detailed investigations of 5,000 highway crashes are conducted annually to provide information on crash dynamics, injury mechanisms, and consequences of those mechanisms, and to support occupant protection research and rulemaking. To supplement the NASS system, the Special Crash Investigation Program conducts from 50 to 75 in-depth investigations per year, concentrating on crashes involving air bag deployments. Paper copies of individual investigations and electronic data files are available to the public. For more information contact NCSA at (202) 366–5394.

In addition, NHTSA's Office of Research and Development has a number of on-going projects examining specific air bag issues. A discussion of these projects can be found in the technical paper discussed later in this notice.

There are certain situations in which air bags can have adverse side effects. As more and more vehicles are equipped with them, these side effects have become better known to researchers. The agency wants to act expeditiously to ensure that these adverse side effects of air bags are minimized or eliminated.

This notice summarizes what NHTSA knows about side effects of air bags and how it plans to minimize them in the future. NHTSA is also asking manufacturers, insurers, members of the medical community, and any other interested members of the public to share information about air bag designs or experience.

In a frontal crash, the occupant moves forward toward the windshield and instrument panel prior to air bag deployment. The air bag inflator must produce enough energy to inflate the air bag fully in about 25 milliseconds to ''cushion'' the occupant before the occupant strikes the vehicle interior. The energy necessary to inflate the air bag in such a short time interval can cause injury or even fatality to an occupant who is not properly restrained, especially to children, given their small stature and light weight.

The table below shows, in no particular order, the types of situations in which the agency has some information suggesting there may be a risk of serious injury to vehicle occupants from the air bag.

Group affected	Seating position of primary risk	Probable cause of problem
Unrestrained Small Statured and/or Older People.	Driver Position	Proximity to Air Bag at Time of Deployment.
Infants in Rear-Facing Child Restraints	Passenger Position	Proximity to Air Bag at Time of Deployment.
Children Unrestrained in Front Seat	Passenger Position	Proximity to Air Bag at Time of Deployment.
Out-of-Position Occupants	Driver and Passenger Position	Proximity to Air Bag at Time of Deployment
Persons with Disabilities	Driver Position	Proximity to Air Bag at Time of Deployment; Adaptive Equipment between Air Bag and Driver; Safety Features in Vehicle Must be Modified to Accommodate Adaptive Equipment.
Persons Experiencing Extremity Injuries	Driver and Passenger Position	Unknown; Under Study.

It appears from this table that the primary task is to reduce the risk to occupants who are very near the air bag at the time of deployment. Such actions, however, won't necessarily help persons with disabilities.

NHTSA has already taken steps to address the problem of infants in rear-facing child seats by warning parents of air bag/infant restraint interaction problems through consumer advisories and warnings on infant restraints, on sun visors, and in owner's manuals. NHTSA's position is that rear-facing child seats should be used only in the rear seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag.[1] In addition, on May 23, 1995, NHTSA published a final rule amending Standard No. 208, *Occupant Crash Protection,* to allow manufacturers the option of installing a manual device that motorists could use to deactivate the front passenger-side air bag in vehicles in which infant restraints can only fit in the front seat.

[1] A complete description of various steps NHTSA has taken to address this problem can be found in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published on October 7, 1994 (59 FR 51158).

For air bag vehicles already on the road or being produced in this model year, the agency's primary efforts will be directed at better educating the public about the characteristics of air bags and the steps which the public can take to minimize the likelihood of experiencing adverse side effects from air bags. On October 27, 1995, the agency issued a consumer advisory focusing on preventing children from being injured. The consumer advisory recommends three specific steps: (1) always restrain children properly, (2) put them in the back seat whenever possible, and (3)

when they must ride in the front seat, move the seat back as far as possible—away from the air bag. NHTSA will continue to work with state safety officials, national safety and medical organizations, vehicle manufacturers, insurers, and interested citizens to educate the public in this area.

In addition, anyone with knowledge of an unusual injury or fatality resulting from a low speed or other crash involving an air bag-equipped vehicle is urged to report this information to NHTSA's Auto Safety Hotline at (800) 424–9393 or (202) 366–0123.

For vehicles manufactured far enough in the future to incorporate significant design changes, NHTSA believes that there will be technological enhancements available that could minimize the unintended side effects of air bags. Vehicle manufacturers and air bag suppliers are now working on highly advanced air bags, often called ''smart bags.'' These smart bags include advanced technologies for occupant sensing, phased deployment of air bags, and so forth. These technologies will be able to perform a number of functions, including preventing air bag deployment when they sense that an occupant is too close to the point of deployment, inflating the air bag at different speeds according to the severity of the crash, and preventing the bag from deploying in the absence of an occupant at that seating position. Based on discussions with suppliers and vehicle manufacturers, NHTSA anticipates these types of smart bags will eventually be widely incorporated into production. The agency will step up its monitoring of manufacturer efforts to use smart bags, especially the technologies being explored, the practicability and reliability of smart bag systems, and the timetables for availability of smart bag systems.

While NHTSA anticipates that these smart bag systems will substantially minimize adverse side effects of air bags in the not too distant future, this still leaves the question of what can be done in addition to public education for the near future. Manufacturers may be able to make adjustments to existing air bag systems. Further, NHTSA may be able to make temporary adjustments to its regulations if it is shown to be necessary to enable manufacturers to minimize any adverse side effects during this period.

For example, Ford has requested that NHTSA amend its crash testing procedures in Standard No. 208. The standard currently requires test dummies to be protected in a 30 mile per hour (mph) crash both when wearing safety belts and when not wearing the belts (i.e., protected by the air bag alone). Ford asked that the test speed for the unbelted dummies be lowered to 25 mph, while the test speed for the belted dummies be raised to 35 mph. According to Ford, this change would allow manufacturers to better ''tune'' the interaction between the air bag and the safety belt so as to optimize the protection afforded to occupants who use their belts. Ford stated that the current testing procedure forces manufacturers to base occupant protection designs solely on the air bag, rather than the interaction between the air bag and the belt. Ford believes that such a change can reduce air bag-induced injuries.

In response to this request, NHTSA prepared a detailed preliminary technical assessment of the issues presented in Ford's request. This technical assessment sets forth the agency's knowledge with respect to injuries from air bags. To help move public discussion forward in this area, NHTSA has placed copies of its technical assessment of the Ford request in the public docket for this rulemaking. Interested members of the public are invited to comment on the Ford proposal and to review this assessment to gain a better understanding both of what is known and of what is not known by NHTSA about injuries from deploying air bags, as well as the agency's plans for further research and data analyses in this area. Copies of the technical assessment can be obtained from the Docket Section at the address given above or by telephone at (202) 366–4949.

The agency hopes that this request for comments will help the agency obtain the information needed to make reasoned decisions about whether some regulatory changes are needed for the interim period, whether some simple technological fixes are available to minimize side effects until smart bags become a reality, or whether other activities, such as consumer information, offer the best chance of effectively minimizing these side effects.

Persons with disabilities may have problems with air bags in addition to those that result primarily from their proximity to the air bag at the time of deployment. While many drivers with disabilities may have a problem because of having to sit very near the steering wheel, they may also face unique problems because of the special adaptive equipment needed to allow them to drive. This adaptive equipment may reduce the protection afforded by air bags by interfering with their deployment. In September 1994, the agency issued a consumer advisory cautioning drivers with disabilities not to use steering control devices mounted on a bar installed across the steering wheel hub (a ''spanner bar'').

Light trucks that meet certain criteria, defined as ''vehicles manufactured for operation by persons with disabilities,'' are not required to provide automatic protection until September 1, 1997. Automatic protection may be either an air bag or an automatic belt. As a practical matter, NHTSA believes that light truck manufacturers will install air bags as the only type of automatic protection in their 1998 model year vehicles because of the Federal law that requires air bags in all their vehicles as of September 1, 1998 (the 1999 model year). NHTSA does not now have sufficient data to allow the agency to decide if air bags will pose any unique problems for drivers with disabilities because of the interaction with the special adaptive equipment needed to allow people with disabilities to drive. However, the agency will conduct testing during fiscal year 1996 to examine this subject in detail. This testing will allow NHTSA to take any necessary regulatory and/or consumer information actions before the current exclusion for drivers with disabilities expires in September 1997.

Questions for the Public

To aid the agency in obtaining useful comments, NHTSA is including an appendix to this notice which consists of a number of specific questions and requests for data. For easy reference, the questions are numbered consecutively. NHTSA encourages commenters to provide specific responses for each question for which they may have information or views. In addition, in order to facilitate tabulating the comments by issue, the agency encourages commenters to respond to the questions in sequence, and to identify the number of each question to which they are responding.

NHTSA requests that commenters provide as specific a rationale as possible, including an analysis of safety consequences, for any positions that are taken. Commenters with a technical background are encouraged to provide scientific analysis of these matters. The automobile manufacturers and air bag component and system suppliers are requested to define major milestones for future plans and give estimated completion dates. The agency appreciates that much of this information may be confidential business information and will treat it in accordance with statutory requirements.

The list of questions does not purport to be an all inclusive list of items or information which the public may have available and believe is valuable in assessing the issues. Commenters are encouraged to provide any other data that they believe are relevant.

Public Meeting

NHTSA anticipates holding one or more public meetings on this subject after the written comments have been received.

Rulemaking Analyses and Notices

Executive Order 12866 and DOT Regulatory Policies and Procedures

This document seeks public input on possible regulatory and nonregulatory responses to an emerging issue. It does not contain any regulatory changes that have so far been identified as sufficiently likely to warrant calculation of possible benefits and costs. The task of calculating costs is further complicated by the fact that while some of the regulatory changes would mandate changes to existing air bag designs, those changes would not involve the addition or deletion of easily identifiable design elements or features. NHTSA has not analyzed the impact of this notice under E.O. 12866 and the Department of Transportation's regulatory policies and procedures. If at some time in the future the agency proposes some regulatory action, it will make the determinations in connection with that future action.

Executive Order 12612 (Federalism)

NHTSA has analyzed this notice in accordance with the principles and criteria contained in E.O. 12612, and has determined that it does not have significant federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a Federalism Assessment.

Submission of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit comments. It is requested but not required that 10 copies be submitted.

All comments must not exceed 15 pages in length. (49 CAR 553.21). Necessary attachments may be appended to these submissions without regard to the 15-page limit. This limitation is intended to encourage commenters to detail their primary arguments in a concise fashion.

If a commenter wishes to submit certain information under a claim of confidentiality, three copies of the complete submission, including purportedly confidential business information, should be submitted to the Chief Counsel, NHTSA, at the street address given above, and seven copies from which the purportedly confidential information has been deleted should be submitted to the Docket Section. A request for confidentiality should be accompanied by a cover letter setting forth the information specified in the agency's confidential business information regulation. 49 CAR part 512.

All comments received before the close of business on the comment closing date indicated above will be considered, and will be available for examination in the docket at the above address both before and after that date. To the extent possible, comments filed after the closing date will also be considered. Comments will be available for inspection in the docket. The NHTSA will continue to file relevant information as it becomes available in the docket after the closing date, and it is recommended that interested persons continue to examine the docket for new material.

Those persons desiring to be notified upon receipt of their comments in the rules docket should enclose a self-addressed, stamped postcard in the envelope with their comments. Upon receiving the comments, the docket supervisor will return the postcard by mail.

List of Subjects in 49 CFR Part 571

Imports, Motor vehicle safety, Motor vehicles.

(Authority: 49 U.S.C. 322, 30111, 30115, 30117, and 30166; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.50)

Issued on November 6, 1995.

Barry Felrice,

Associate Administrator for Safety Performance Standards.

Appendix—List of Questions

Field Experience With Air Bags

As discussed above, NHTSA relies on data from FARS and NASS, including the Special Crash Investigation Program, to monitor air bag performance in crashes. However, the public, particularly insurers, vehicle manufacturers, and the medical community may have information that would supplement the NHTSA data regarding air bag performance in crashes.

1. Please provide any available air bag performance information in the following areas, separately for each calendar year from 1987 to the present[2]:

a. The total number of air bag deployments in crashes during the calendar year;

b. The air bag deployments in crashes for each make/model of vehicle;

c. The total number of air bag deployments in crashes in which the crash severity was 15 mph or less or in which little damage occurred to the vehicle; and

d. Any cases of deployment in which the air bag may have contributed to serious injuries or fatalities for occupants - if such cases are identified, please provide details about the position in which the occupant was seated (driver or passenger position), the injured person's gender, age, height, and weight, whether the occupant was belted, unbelted, or in a child restraint, and the source for this information (e.g., police report, insurance claim, hospital report, etc.).

e. Any cases of deployment in which the air bag may have saved lives, prevented injuries or reduced injury severity, etc.

NHTSA requests that when insurance companies provide data about field experience, it would be very helpful if they would include the number of vehicles they insured in each calendar year (insured vehicle years).

2. What information is available concerning the reduction or increase in different types of injuries and injury severities that may be associated with the introduction of air bags? The medical community is especially requested to respond to this question.

Crash Sensing

NHTSA's data indicate that situations in which air bags appear to have contributed to serious or fatal injuries have occurred at crash severities below 15 mph, some even below 10 mph, with minimal damage to the vehicle. The agency is asking the public to provide information that would help NHTSA assess the range of deployment thresholds currently chosen by vehicle manufacturers for their different vehicles, why those differences exist, and the manufacturers' efforts to adjust and redefine the algorithms used to determine whether the air bag should deploy. Specifically, the agency would like to learn:

3. What algorithms and calibrations do manufacturers use to determine when the air bag should deploy in each of their vehicles?

4. What are the reasons why that threshold for air bag deployment was chosen (e.g., corresponds to the speed at which an unbelted occupant would experience facial fractures from steering wheel, speed at which unbelted occupant would be likely to experience serious chest injuries, etc.)?

5. NHTSA believes that manufacturers generally specify different deployment thresholds for different vehicles. Is this belief correct and, if so, what are the reasons why different deployment thresholds are specified (e.g., more interior room in vehicle, different intended use of vehicle, different target purchasers, etc.)?

6. How do the deployment thresholds specified for different vehicles correlate to the speed the thresholds represent in a frontal crash test into a fixed rigid barrier?

Air Bag Inflators

Ford indicated in its request to the agency that it could reduce the air bag inflator onset

[2] September 1, 1986 was the start of the phase-in of automatic protection for all new passenger cars. Automatic protection means a vehicle must offer either air bags or automatic belts. Accordingly, 1987 was the first year for which any substantial number of vehicles with air bags were on the road.

rate simply by decreasing the amount of propellant contained in the inflator. Ford said that such a change could be made quickly and would, in Ford's opinion, reduce the incidence of air bag-induced injuries, particularly to upper extremities, and allow more optimal tuning of current safety belt systems.

7. Please provide as detailed information as possible about current air bag inflators, including inflator tank pressure curves, the effect of reduced propellant on those pressure curves and the overall performance of the inflator, and inflators that use dual or multiple staged inflation. The agency is particularly interested in learning why manufacturers have chosen the particular characteristics for the inflators used in their vehicles (e.g., cost, simplicity, etc.) and the leadtime that would be needed to change inflator characteristics in production vehicles.

Air Bag Design

NHTSA knows that there are many variables in air bag design that may affect the performance of air bag systems in the field. The agency would like to learn if there are data that indicate any of these variables significantly affect the performance of air bag systems. The variables NHTSA has identified thus far include:

—Air Bag Volume
—Air Bag Fold Patterns
—Air Bag Tethering
—Air Bag Venting
—Air Bag Mass/Material
—Shape and Size of Air Bag Module Opening
—Module location and deployment path

To help answer questions about these variables, NHTSA would like to learn:

8. What are the parameters for each of the above variables on the air bags used in current vehicles?

9. To the extent that a manufacturer uses different parameters on different vehicles, what are the reasons for the difference?

10. What other variables not identified above affect air bag performance, and what is the basis for that belief?

11. What is the estimated leadtime needed to change each of these variables in production vehicles, and what are the reasons for why such leadtime is needed?

Proximity Considerations

Most of the fatalities involving air bags have occurred to children and small statured adults who were unbelted or otherwise improperly restrained, possibly out of position, and very close to the air bag at deployment. To assist the agency in identifying possible approaches to mitigate the problem in these circumstances, the public is asked to provide any data or information that may be available on the following subjects:

12. Is there a quantified minimum safe distance from the inflator nozzle/air bag at the time of deployment for air bags generally or for any particular air bag designs? If so, please provide that information and the data in support of that distance.

For the following questions, NHTSA is especially interested in all the data and information that support the response given. In addition, the agency would like the public to identify the trade-offs that would be involved in taking any of these actions.

13. Do ''top mounted'' air bags substantially reduce the adverse side effects at the passenger position?

14. Can the adverse side effects be substantially reduced by recessing the inflator/air bag either in the steering wheel assembly or in the dash?

15. Would displacement of the inflator away from the occupant at deployment substantially reduce the adverse side effects?

16. Would pedal adjusters (which move the pedals closer to the driver and allow the driver's arms instead of leg length to determine how close the driver must sit) reduce adverse side effects of air bags by allowing drivers to sit further back?

17. Would telescoping and/or tilt steering wheel assemblies substantially reduce the adverse side effects of air bags?

18. Can advanced sensors, which would either sound a warning or not deploy when an occupant was too close to an air bag, substantially reduce the adverse side effects of air bags?

19. Would safety belt pre-tensioners reduce the risk of air bag deployment injuries?

20. What laboratory test procedures and devices do manufacturers use and find appropriate to assess inflation hazards to occupants in close proximity to the driver or passenger air bag?

Near Term Considerations

The agency would like to know if there are near term (six months to one year) changes which could significantly reduce the probabilities of the serious injuries and fatalities attributed to air bag deployment. The agency is aware that some possible near term changes to air bags could involve safety tradeoffs; i.e., reducing certain types of injuries while allowing increases in others, offering higher protection at higher speeds at the expense of lower speed crashes, or protecting certain types of occupants (e.g., belted or those of small stature) at the expense of others (e.g., unbelted or large occupants). The agency would like to obtain information on possible near term changes and any safety tradeoffs associated with such changes. NHTSA is particularly interested in the effects of any potential changes on particular groups, such as young adults and children, and occupants of the growing light truck and van market, where belt use has traditionally been lower.

21. What would be the safety consequences of permitting manual air bag cut-off switches? Are there policy or other considerations that warrant treating the driver's and passenger's positions differently? How difficult would it be to retrofit such devices for vehicles on the road?

22. It seems that a change in deployment threshold could be made relatively quickly simply by modifying the calibration of the sensors or the algorithm used for deployment. What is the estimated leadtime needed to change the deployment threshold used in current air bag designs, and why is that amount of leadtime needed to make such a change?

23. What would be the safety consequences of a reduction or modification of the inflation rate?

24. How quickly can the manufacturers develop module locations that are recessed in the steering wheel or the instrument panel?

Future Plans

The agency is aware that much effort is underway to develop various levels of ''smart'' air bag systems. These smart air bag systems may range from dual threshold sensors that deploy the bag at different crash severities by recognizing whether the occupant is restrained or unrestrained (such systems are already in some luxury vehicles) to systems that include items such as:

Variable inflation rates
Occupant seat sensors
Proximity detection/sensing
Dual or multi-stage inflators/sensors
Dual or variable venting, etc.

25. Please provide detailed information concerning the technologies and strategies being considered in each of the above areas, as well as any other advanced air bag concepts, and the potential and expected dates of implementation.

Obstacles to Near and Long Term Plans

26. The agency requests information and explanations of any obstacles that may hinder advancements in reaching near or long term solutions to these problems. These could include or require changes in present regulations or the development of new regulations. Please provide recommendations for any agency actions that could be beneficial, the rationale for that action, and its safety consequences (quantified, if possible).

27. As discussed above, Ford has requested that the agency reduce FMVSS 208's unbelted test speed from 30 mph to 25 mph. According to Ford, this would make it easier for it to reduce the air bag inflation speed, thereby reducing low speed air bag injuries.

a. If NHTSA were to make a short-term change in FMVSS 208 to facilitate quick reductions in air bag inflation speeds (i.e., a change that would apply until manufacturers can implement smart air bags or other design changes to address low speed air bag injuries), how would manufacturers respond? What would be the specific safety consequences of such a change, including possible adverse consequences for unbelted occupants and for occupants in much higher speed crashes?

b. A reduction in FMVSS 208's unbelted test speed might not be the only way to facilitate quick reductions in air bag inflation speeds. For example, NHTSA could possibly retain the 30 mph unbelted test but temporarily increase the chest loading maximum of 60 g's for that test. FMVSS No. 208 currently specifies the same chest loading maximum for both the belted and unbelted tests. The agency notes that a preliminary review of recent biomechanical data generated for NHTSA suggests that the human tolerance to acceleration for serious chest injury may be higher for air bags than for belts, because the air bag delivers a more broadly distributed, uniform loading to the chest than does a safety belt. Would

manufacturers respond to this type of change differently than for the change suggested by Ford? What would be the specific safety consequences of such a change, including possible adverse consequences?

Air Bag Issues Related to Persons With Disabilities

28. What has been the experience in modifying air bag-equipped vehicles to be driven by persons with disabilities? What type of problems have been encountered? Have the drivers been pleased with the results?

29. Has any person with a disability that you know of been involved in a crash in which the air bag deployed at his or her seating position?

30. Were any of these persons apparently saved from serious injury by the air bag? If so, please describe the situation.

31. Has any person with a disability been injured by the deployment of an air bag in a vehicle (mpv, car or truck)? If so, please provide as much information as possible on the event.

32. Is it very common that children with disabilities (whether small enough to use a child seat or not) *must* for health reasons sit in the front seat to be near the driver, when the driver is the only adult in the vehicle. Of these, how many can not use conventional seat belts, or child seats, due to their disabilities?

33. How many persons in the U.S. use steering control devices mounted on steering wheels containing air bags? What is your source of data, or how would you estimate this number?

34. What types of conditions in persons with disabilities would make them more susceptible to injury from an air bag (driver or passenger) than any other person in the same seating position? Would these people also be more susceptible to seat belt-induced injury?

[FR Doc. 95–27781 Filed 11–6–95; 11:29 am]

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