



Speak Up!

5 MEDIA RELATIONS

Media Relations

- Key principles of media relations
- Sample press release
- Sample letter to the editor
- Sample op ed



1. Understand the media. Know what kind of story they want.
2. Get to know reporters. Know which reporters at each outlet cover highway safety issues. Given media cutbacks, it's likely there may not be a specific reporter covering highway safety.
3. Develop a thorough press list. Nearly all reporters prefer to be e-mailed releases. As a courtesy, request that you add a reporter to your list before sending the first release.
4. Be creative.
5. Use statistics to capture the media's attention.
6. Serve as a resource. Be available to answer questions about highway safety issues. Even if it is a safety issue that your office doesn't address, be the "one stop shop" for highway safety. Make sure reporters know how to contact you during non-business hours.
7. Set up a Google Alert for your office and your key principles. Make sure you are monitoring other highway safety stories in your state. If you aren't in the stories, contact the reporter and introduce yourself.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should be concise and specific. They should also be no longer than 300 words. If the letter you are sending refers to a previous article or editorial, be sure to cite the author's name and title and the date of publication. Letters to the editor are usually used to refute an earlier editorial argument, suggest a differing view, or express support.

OP-ED ARTICLES

These pieces usually focus on one idea and endeavor to leave the reader with a new perspective or analysis of an issue. The acceptable length of an Op-Ed article varies from newspaper to newspaper. The usual length is 500-700 words. Contact each paper for more information on their requirements. Op-Eds are becoming less and less frequent, so don't be discouraged if you don't succeed in getting placement.

NEWS RELEASES

News releases are used to announce an upcoming event or the release of a product or research project. They are also used to share an organization/company's views on the news of the day.

New releases should be as concise as possible. The general rule is to remain within two pages in length. News releases should be written in the inverted pyramid style, with the most important information in the first paragraph and less important information following. When writing a news release, be sure to answer six key questions in the first paragraph; Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? End the release with a "###" in the center of the page to indicate that the release is complete.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Using social or new media can enhance your program. Some states use tools such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs to share their message. If you use social media, it should be done as part of your comprehensive communications program and not a stand-alone effort.

While it is tempting to jump into social media, don't do it just to do it. Investigate whether it is worth the time commitment and make sure you can sustain the effort. Investigate what other states are doing in this area. Ask questions and look for best practices. If you aren't registered for the GHSA Communications Discussion Group, call 202-789-0942 to register.

Communicating Reauthorization Messages

In tough economic times when newspapers are downsizing and there are many competing priorities, it will be more difficult than ever to secure additional highway safety coverage that will, in turn, help support the need for more funding. The communication strategy should help support the state's reauthorization positions.

When you promote your office's enforcement and other efforts, indicate that these efforts are funded through a federal authorization in the SAFETEA-LU highway program.

If you aren't permitted to actively advocate on the reauthorization, encourage your media contacts to sign-up for GHSA's media list www.ghsa.org. Ask GHSA to contact key reporters in your state.

Share GHSA reauthorization talking points in your media outreach. If you can't do this in a news release, social media is another option.

As reauthorization heats up, offer your GR or Coordinator to media to discuss what the legislation would mean to your state. If you can't do this, work with GHSA to fill this role.

GHSA issued this news release in March, 2009. Additional releases will follow as reauthorization develops.



News
Release

For Immediate Release
March 3, 2009

Contact: Jonathan Adkins
(202)789-0942, ext. 12 or 13
(202)669-9746, cell

**State Highway Safety Group Calls for
Paradigm Shift in Safety Discussion
*Presents 10-Point Plan for Congressional Action***

(Washington, DC)—The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) today called on Congress to enhance and alter the federal highway safety program as it begins work on the highway bill reauthorization. GHSA also announced its support of an ambitious new highway safety goal—*Toward Zero Deaths: Every Life Counts*—as a means for reinforcing the fact that highway deaths are preventable and tragically unnecessary.

The current highway authorization is set to expire at the end of September. Congress is expected to begin work on reauthorizing the nearly \$300 billion program soon. GHSA members currently receive approximately \$600 million annually in highway safety grant funding to address behavioral safety issues such as drunk driving, inadequate occupant protection, speeding and data improvement.

According to GHSA Chairman Vernon F. Betkey Jr., “Our proposal centers on a new and ambitious goal of *Toward Zero Deaths*. We know that highway deaths are preventable, and with an increase of attention and funding, the more than 40,000 families who lose loved ones each year in crashes can be spared this emotional and financial hardship. We are urging policy-makers to support funding for increased enforcement, new technologies and better tools for data collection to launch a new era in highway safety. GHSA urges Congress to emphasize performance-based planning, increase funding for better data and streamline the programs. We know what needs to be done and we ask Congress to give us the tools to achieve this ambitious goal.”



GHSA issued this news release in March, 2009. Additional releases will follow as reauthorization develops.

GHSA specifically calls on Congress to:

- **Maintain a Strong Federal Role in Highway Safety**– The United States was once a leader in highway safety but has now fallen to tenth in the world, according to the World Health Organization. To regain our leadership position, the federal government must provide strong leadership in addressing the problem of traffic crashes, fatalities and injuries.
- **Develop a National Strategic Highway Safety Plan**–To regain the United State's role as a leader in highway safety, a national plan of action needs to be developed in coordination with state and local efforts. States already have strategic highway safety plans, and these successful efforts should be duplicated on the national level.
- **Emphasize performance-based planning**–States should be encouraged to use a minimum, standard set of performance measures in their planning processes and fund further efforts to identify and implement additional performance measures for the future.
- **Enhance funding for data improvements**–Funding for the section 408 data program should be increased to \$100 million a year so the program can become the engine for state highway safety data improvements.
- **Streamline grant program administration**–Currently, GHSA members administer ten different grant programs with varying deadlines and funding streams. Too much time is spent on program administration taking away from critical implementation of highway safety programs.
- **Enhance flexibility**–States should be able to flex a portion of their behavioral funding between grant programs and should be able to pool their funding together. This will allow states to match their funding with what their data dictates.
- **Restructure incentive programs and encourage technological developments through incentives**–Technology should be encouraged through incentives, new grant programs should be created to address teen driving and speed-related crashes, and programs addressing seat belt use and motorcycle safety should be broadened.
- **Strengthen state programs through accountability, training and research**–Existing accountability requirements should be continued, and new training and research opportunities should be supported.
- **Strengthen state Strategic Highway Safety Plan requirements**–States should be required to regularly update their plans, there should be more flexibility in funding, and these plans should be easily accessible to the public.
- **Oppose new sanctions but maintain the 21-drinking age law**–In general, GHSA opposes new sanctions on states that do not enact certain laws. GHSA believes that incentives are a more appropriate method to encourage state action. GHSA will, however, strongly oppose any effort to repeal the 21-drinking law. This law has been tremendously successful and repeal would be a giant step backward for highway safety.

The Governors Highway Safety Association® (GHSA) is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy and enhance program management. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans.



To the right is a sample of an availability release you could create once reauthorization is in the news. Contact GHSA for suggestions on timing.

Kansas State Highway Safety Leader Available to Comment on Federal Transportation Proposal

Who: Pete Bodyk, Chief of the Kansas Bureau of Traffic. He directs the state's behavioral highway safety program and administers grants from the federal government. He is also an active member in the Governors Highway Safety Association, the national organization that represents the behavioral highway safety programs of states in Washington, D.C.

What: Mr. Bodyk is available to respond to the U.S. Department of Transportation's proposal to reauthorize SAFETEA-LU. This legislation authorized highway safety grant programs that states use for efforts such as increasing seat belt usage and reducing drunk driving. Mr. Bodyk can address with the federal proposal will mean for Kansas and what Congress can do that best helps the state.

Contact Information: To reach Mr. Bodyk, please call or e-mail Jane Safety Press Officer at 555-555-1212 or e-mail jane@safety.org. After normal business hours, please call..... More information regarding Kansas' views on the SAFETEA-LU reauthorization can be found online at www.ksdot.gov. More information on the goals of state highway safety offices nationally can be found at www.ghsa.org.



SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE TO ANNOUNCE YOUR OFFICE'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow the Office of Highway Safety on Twitter!

Dover – The Delaware Office of Highway Safety (OHS) is now on the social networking site Twitter! You can follow OHS at www.twitter.com/DEHighwaySafe. OHS's Community Relations Officer will be posting "tweets" about traffic safety issues such as seat belts, impaired driving, aggressive driving and speeding, bicycle, pedestrian, motorcycle and car seat safety.

"We are continually looking for new ways to reach out to and engage Delaware residents on the issue of traffic safety and improving behind the wheel behaviors," said Andrea Summers, Community Relations Officer for the Office of Highway Safety. "Twitter, as one of the fastest growing social media tools, is a great way to do that. It's appealing to teens who are a generation of born computer users, as well as to young and middle aged adults who favor this unique and user friendly format."

Summers says the OHS Twitter page is useful for mainstream media as well. She adds that she is able to post quick bits of information such as a "did you know that 2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the seat belt" "tweet" that may not warrant a full blown press release, but which may still generate interest in developing a story.

Summers is currently "twitter-ing" about OHS's month long speed enforcement blitz with Delaware State Police, but in a few days will start posting tweets about the issue of underage drinking. "I've been testing this forum out for about six months trying to determine the best way to use it. Now we'd like to invite everyone in the public to follow along." Delawareans can also learn more about OHS initiatives by visiting the agency's website at www.ohs.delaware.gov.

Andrea Summers

Community Relations Officer

(302) 672-7642 (**new office line**)

(302) 943-7293 (**new cell**)

* GHSA Communications Cmttee Chair

* Secy National Information Officers Association



SAMPLE OP-ED

Time to put brakes on superspeeders

By Bob Dallas

For the Journal-Constitution

Friday, March 06, 2009

Three hundred and 84. That's the number of Georgians killed in speed-related crashes here in 2007. That's more than a speeding death a day. And yet, year in and year out, nearly a quarter of Georgia crash fatalities involve motorists who continue to drive at excessive deadly speeds.

That's why Gov. Sonny Perdue designed the "superspeeder" legislation for Georgia: to save precious lives by targeting the worst of the worst of our speeders. They're the violators who rocket along in excess of 85 miles per hour on any road they choose. They're the offenders who fly by at 75 on your hometown, two-lane roads. They're rolling tragedies, out cruising in search of another memorial roadside cross in your community.

Under superspeeder, these high-risk drivers would be hit with a \$200 fine designed to change their high-risk behavior. High-risk drivers who have their licenses suspended for excessive points would face higher reinstatement fees and safe driver course requirements.

Some critics claim superspeeder legislation is a revenue generator. And for the first time, those critics are right. These fees will help fund Georgia's trauma care network. Because, in fact, 60 percent of trauma care in Georgia is provided to victims of vehicle crashes. Now those who place this burden on Georgia's trauma care network will for the first time help shoulder that cost.

Some drivers believe their high-risk, high-speed driving causes no harm. They're not just wrong, they're dead wrong. Here's why: For every 10 mph increase in speed, there's a doubling of energy release when a crash occurs. And the faster we drive, the more our reaction time is reduced. So, we may ignore the laws of the road but we can't ignore the laws of physics. It's a fact that superspeeders cause more deaths and serious injuries on our roadways.

If you've spent any time driving in Georgia, you instinctively know we have a speeding problem. Strangely enough, slowing down actually helps us all get to our destinations quicker! About half of all metro congestion is caused by crashes. The more severe the crash, the longer it takes to clear the roads. Slowing down helps all Georgians save time and money while driving.

Independent studies by groups like the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety prove that speeding in Georgia is a deadly concern. The governor's superspeeder legislation will save lives and reduce serious injury on Georgia roadways.

In addition to the hundreds of thousands of careful Georgia drivers who follow the law, there are at least 384 families in Georgia every year who would agree that we need superspeeder legislation to help us all slow down and save lives.

Bob Dallas is director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety.