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A Crash is Not an Accident

EDITORS AND CORRESPONDENTS

A crash is not an accident.

Changing the way we think about events and the words we use to describe them affects the way we behave. Motor vehicle crashes occur "when a link or several links in the chain" are broken. Continued use of the word "accident" implies that these events are outside human influence or control. In reality, they are predictable results of specific actions.

Since we can identify the causes of crashes, we can take action to alter the effect and avoid collisions. These are not Acts of God but predictable results of the laws of physics.

The concept of "accident" works against bringing all appropriate resources to bear on the enormous problem of highway collisions. Use of "accident" fosters the idea that the resulting damage and injuries are unavoidable.

"Crash," "collision," and "injury" are more appropriate terms, and we encourage their use as substitutes for "accident."

Along with the Department's Research and Special Programs Administration, the Federal Highway Administration has joined the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in declaring that the word "accident" will no longer be used in materials we publish, in speeches or other statements, or in communications with the media and others.

Sincerely yours,

George L. Reagle

Associate Administrator for Motor Carriers

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