



Monthly Report – January, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 2– ISSN 2332-063X

Vision Zero & A Tale of Two Volvos

Louis V. Lombardo

Biblical proverb: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18.

The American people have been suffering and perishing without a vision for eliminating the hundreds of daily tragedies of crash deaths and serious injuries for more than a century. More than 3,659,000 Americans have died of crash injuries and an estimated 725 million have suffered crash injuries. See <http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/clock.php>

America's No Vision Zero Goal

In 1997, the Swedish Parliament adopted a Vision Zero policy for Sweden. Nearly 20 years later, neither the U.S. Congress nor three Presidents of the U.S.A. have done so. Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama each experienced family tragedies involving fatal crashes. Yet each President failed to adopt a Vision Zero Goal of Zero Crash Deaths in or by a new vehicle in a decade. See <http://www.fairwarning.org/2012/09/a-strange-indifference-to-highway-carnage/>

Since 1997 about 660,000 Americans have died of their crash injuries in the U.S.A. And another estimated 35 million Americans suffered crash injuries. Since 1997 the number of Americans who have died of crash injuries and suffered injuries now exceeds the number of Americans that died and were injured in all wars since 1776. That number is 2,717,993. See <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812032.pdf> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_casualties_of_war

NHTSA recently estimated societal crash losses for the year 2010 to amount to \$871 Billion. Over the 17 years since 1997 societal losses in the U.S.A. now approach an estimated \$15 Trillion. See <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812013.pdf>

Why can't our Presidents articulate a vision to end crash violence and its human consequences and costs in a decade? In large part it is because of the successful strategy for corporate control of American policy that was described in the 1971 Lewis Powell memo. See http://reclaimdemocracy.org/powell_memo_lewis/

Hope for Vision Zero Crash Deaths in America

Thankfully, Mayor De Blasio has adopted a Vision Zero Goal for NY City. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/13/nyregion/de-blasio-looks-toward-sweden-for-road-safety.html>

Then there is the hope in the excellent magazine Vision Zero International. See <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/24bb38a3%23/24bb38a3/16>

Thankfully too, Volvo has also adopted a corporate Vision Zero Goal for deaths and serious injuries in or by a new Volvo by the year 2020.

In September of 2012, I encouraged increased marketing of safety to strengthen market forces demanding safer vehicles. In particular, I hoped Volvo would do more and better safety marketing. See <http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/assets/lombardo-CTTI-Sept2012.pdf>

Now Volvo has created an informative ad on the subject of Vision Zero. See <http://paidpost.nytimes.com/volvo/cruising-towards-zero.html#.VOsySXYhuiA>

While it is nice that Volvo has created this ad, it adopts a wrong metric that the industry likes to promote: fatalities per billion miles traveled. This distance metric offers consumers little comfort knowing that they can travel a bit farther before being killed. The gold standard metric in public health is fatalities per 100,000 population. For a corporation it would be useful to use a metric of fatalities per million (or 100,000) registered vehicle years as is shown possible by the insurance industry. See <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/driver-death-rates>
And <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/ratings/vehicle/v/volvo/s60>

A Tale of Two Volvos - American & Chinese Ownership

Ford purchased Volvo in 1999 and owned it until Ford sold Volvo in 2010 to Geely. How did the American Ford management do on Volvo safety?

Ford shut down Volvo's advertising on the safety of its roof crush strength. This is a textbook classic case of corporate safety malfeasance. Rollover crashes were, and still are, a major cause of fatalities and serious injuries. At the time about 10,000 rollover crash deaths and 16,000 serious injuries were occurring each year in the U.S.A. See story at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/14/automobiles/14roof.html?pagewanted=print&position=>

And then see how NHTSA behaved under George W. Bush and his Chief of Staff Andrew Card, formerly of GM, in the White House at the time. See <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/may/04/business/fi-nhtsa4>

Today, Volvo is under Chinese ownership of Geely Motors and may be more interested in providing safety leadership around the world. And Volvo has a tradition and expertise of safety leadership.

The Car Book 2015 awarded the Volvo S60 its highest rating and its "Best Bet". But the 2015 Volvo S60 still has substantial room for added safety improvement. It lacks a knee bolster airbag, just "Average" side impact protection, no dynamic head restraints, and several crash avoidance technologies that are not standard - just optional.

It is particularly upsetting to see Volvo's "Average" side impact protection. While I was at NHTSA a decade ago, I had to witness a Volvo side impact crash test for the Agency. The two Volvo engineers were sweating because they wanted a 5 Star crash test result. I asked them why they did not design the vehicle with a 20% margin of safety so they would not have to sweat the test? They said it would have required a little more structural strength. Imagine if they had to explain that to the family of a crash victim who died or became brain injured or suffered quadriplegia? Or imagine explaining that to a jury? See <http://www.autosafety.org/books-reports>

Volvo is doing well on safety but it can, and must, do better!

And consumers too can make wiser market choices in the purchase of new vehicles to be safer. The Car Book 2015 rates the new vehicles from best to worst. Buy one of the best and avoid one of the worst.

Last year when I wrote a report on the Car Book for 2014, I mentioned one tip that can reduce the risk of crash death by about 10% - for free! Choose a white color car. I wrote:

“White cars have been found to be about 10% safer. See”

<http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/blog-whitecars.php>

See <http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/assets/monthly-report-feb2014.pdf>

I still think this is good advice to readers. Auto companies may not like it and view it as an infringement on their marketing freedom. But if “any color as long as it is black” was good enough for Henry Ford, today, consumers ought to say they’ll buy any color as long as it is white.