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Note: Report available at www.driveforlife.com/newsroom.html

Families warned: 101 deadliest days on the road begin Saturday

Fatality and travel projections up despite higher gas prices

Washington D.C. – More Americans will die on the road this summer, with travel up despite record gas prices, making the 101 days from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day the deadliest days on the road, according to a new report by a national coalition of driving safety advocacy groups.

New projections by the U.S. Department of Transportation estimate that 511 Americans will die on the road this Memorial Day weekend, one of the peak weekends of the year for traffic fatalities. Despite higher gas prices, AAA predicts that more Americans will travel this weekend: 37 million Americans will travel more than 50 miles from home, based on a survey of AAA's 47 million members – a 3.6 percent increase from last year.

“Americans drive more than one trillion miles during the summer vacation months,” said Susan Pikrallidas, AAA's Vice President of Public Affairs. “For thousands of families, their trips will end in needless tragedy. We need to change that.”

Drive for Life's “*101 Deadliest Days on the Road*” report details six factors that contribute to fatal crashes and offers survival strategies to keep families safe. Major summer-crash contributors are **failure to wear safety belts or use child safety seats properly, drinking and driving, fatigue, car maintenance failures, speed, and distractions**. Drive for Life is an initiative of AAA, Volvo Cars of North America, and Partners for Highway Safety, in cooperation with law enforcement and highway safety groups. Key findings include:

- **Nearly 13,000 Americans will die and 850,000 will be injured in car crashes during the 101 days.**
- **More children die in motor vehicle deaths in summer**, with crashes being the No. 1 cause of children's deaths.
- **Teen traffic deaths also peak in summer**, when inexperienced teen drivers log significantly more hours behind the wheel and are much more likely to drive at night.
- **Parents driving with children are more likely to drive fatigued and at night**, when they are most likely to encounter drunk drivers.

“We pride ourselves on building the safest vehicles that we can engineer. But driver behavior is essential part to keeping families safe on the road,” said Thomas Andersson, executive vice president of Volvo Cars of North America, LLC.

What's a family to do? Paul Burris, president of Partners for Highway Safety, urged drivers to develop summer safety plans and make a commitment to safer habits when they take to the road with their

families this summer. Among the key behaviors are buckling up, making sure child safety seats are installed properly and keeping older children in booster seats for longer, doing some basic car maintenance before heading out on a trip, and avoiding distractions.

“Families can significantly improve their prospects for a safe trip by avoiding distractions when they take their families on the road, and driving only when they are at their physical best – not when they are tired, sick or after drinking alcohol,” Burris said. “Especially when your children are in the seat behind you, turn off the cell phone, put down the sandwich, face the road and give driving your full attention. Don’t let anything distract you – including the kids.”

The report highlighted these factors as major contributors to family fatalities and crashes on the road:

- **Improper Use of Restraints.** While safety belt use is at an all-time high and child safety seats have dramatically reduced child deaths, still up to 75 percent of child safety seats are improperly installed. And the 20 percent of drivers who don’t buckle up are at much higher risk of not properly buckling up their children.
- **Alcohol use.** Two of every three children killed in an alcohol-related crash were riding with a driver who had been drinking, but who was not necessarily drunk. Nearly a third of teen drivers killed on the road had been drinking. Families are most likely to encounter a drunk driver between midnight and 3 a.m., when they may be trying to cover some miles while children are asleep.
- **Fatigue.** In the past five years, 1.35 million drivers attributed crashes to drowsiness. Those crashes are more likely to be serious and occur on high-speed roads, and the drivers often do not attempt to avoid the crash. During summer, families with children were six times more likely to drive home from a long day trip while fatigued than people without children: 57 percent said they are likely to drive when fatigued to get home from a weekend getaway and 59 percent said they are likely to drive fatigued to get to a destination in one night.
- **Car maintenance.** Neglected maintenance leads to 2,600 deaths annually, nearly 100,000 disabling injuries and more than \$2 billion in lost wages, medical expenses and property damage. Under-inflating or over-inflating tires can result in serious injuries. In the summer, tires are especially vulnerable, because long trips, heavy loads, higher temperatures and higher speeds put additional stress on tires.
- **Speed.** Most crashes occur at 40 mph or less, but most fatal crashes occur at top speeds. Speeding was a contributing factor in at least 30 percent of all fatal crashes, and more than 13,000 lives a year are lost in speeding-related crashes. At least eight in 10 drivers admit to speeding at least monthly on each road type.
- **Distractions.** More than 1.5 million police-reported crashes involved some kind of driver distraction. More than seven million drivers involved in a crash attributed it to distractions, and 292,000 cited talking on a cell phone. Most drivers admit to engaging in one more activity while driving, including eating (59 percent), talking on a cell phone (37 percent) and even reading (14 percent). Other common distractions are talking to passengers (81 percent), changing radio stations or CDs (66 percent) or dealing with children in the backseat (24 percent).

To further raise awareness, Volvo Cars of North America will be giving away one of America's safest SUVs: The Volvo XC90, featuring the world's first gyroscopic roll stability control system to help prevent rollovers. To enter the sweepstakes and gain a chance to win the XC90, licensed drivers may take the “101- Day Survival Quiz” at www.driveforlife.com to qualify for the contest.

Burris, of Partners for Highway Safety, said the educational effort will continue throughout the summer. He said **Drive for Life** will conduct another national poll of driver behaviors and attitudes, to be released in late summer, and the initiative also will air a new national 30-minute television special,

“Drive for Life: The National Safe Driving Test 2004” on PAX-TV on Saturday, Sept. 4 at 7 p.m., during the height of Labor Day Weekend.

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Additional partner quotes:

“We know child safety seats save lives – if they are installed properly,” said National Sheriffs’ Association Deputy Director John Thompson. “Sheriffs’ deputies across the nation have played a big role in saving children’s lives by making it a priority to help families check their child safety seats.”

“We know enforcement works. But we also believe in the power of education,” said Bill Johnson, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations. “Parents have a bigger motivation to drive safely than the fear of a traffic ticket. They have the lives of their children to protect.”