Traffic Safety Conference scheduled June 4–6 on San Antonio Riverwalk

San Antonio, Texas is the home of this year’s Statewide Traffic Safety Conference, organized by the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS). The event draws public policy makers, traffic safety practitioners, law enforcement, traffic engineers, public health officials and many others who are passionate about traffic safety together for a three-day forum. The conference will be held June 4–6 at San Antonio’s Crown Plaza Riverwalk Hotel.

“Communities and individuals across the state are doing new things all the time in their efforts to reduce fatalities and injuries,” CTS Research Scientist Val Pezoldt, who is helping to organize this year’s event, says. “Traffic safety challenges also change. For example, the issue of distracted driving is much different today than it was just a few years ago, and approaches to reducing the impact of distraction on traffic crashes continue to evolve.”


Pezoldt and others are in the process of lining up speakers and the agenda for the conference, which typically attracts more than 200 people from around the state. State Senator Steve Ogden will be this year’s keynote speaker. This is the fourth safety conference organized by CTS, in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation.
Alcohol and drug studies center transfers to CTS

With approval from The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents, the administrative responsibility for the Center for Alcohol and Drug Education Studies (CADES) was transferred to the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) at the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) in January.

CADES — which was founded and directed by Maury Dennis, a retired Texas A&M University professor and a current CTS senior research scientist — began operating in 1997 to address problems caused by alcohol and drug abuse.

CADES has remained in Texas A&M’s Department of Health and Kinesiology in the College of Education and Human Development since Dennis’ retirement from the department in 2006. Since his employment at CTS the following year, Dennis has been successful in acquiring more than $500,000 in alcohol-related research projects for the center.

“The transfer makes a lot of sense,” Dennis said. “I think it now has a very good chance of expansion because of individual TTI experts in alcohol- and driving-related issues. CADES seems to be a perfect fit for the Institute.”

Under Dennis’ leadership, CADES developed numerous statewide education programs including the Texas DWI Education Program, the Texas Alcohol Education Program for Minors, and the Texas Drug and Alcohol Driving Awareness Program. The CADES programs have been instrumental in teaching students, prosecutors, probation officers, expert trial witnesses and alcohol servers various aspects of alcohol-related issues.

“When the administrative responsibility of CADES has been transferred to TTI, the College of Education and Human Development will continue to be involved with center activities and research,” Dennis said.

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– Maury Dennis
CTS Senior Research Scientist
Capitol staff members briefed on high-priority initiatives

More than a dozen staff members representing various state legislators and committees visited the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) on February 21 to hear updates on some of the Institute’s high-priority efforts. The program lineup included several initiatives being pursued by the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS).

CTS Director John Mounce briefly reviewed the Center’s 10-year history before highlighting several key program areas, including:

- Distracted driving – Cell phone use and texting behind the wheel represent a growing roadway safety problem, one that is expected to be the subject of numerous new bills in the next session of the Texas Legislature in 2013.
- Impaired driving – DWI deaths in Texas account for 42 percent of all crash fatalities in the state each year, compared with a national average of 31 percent.
- Latino traffic safety – Latinos, who represent the fastest-growing segment of the population in Texas, are over-represented in roadway crashes.
- Military traffic safety – in the years since the 9-11 attacks, more soldiers have died in vehicle crashes than in combat.
- Law enforcement – CTS researchers will continue their efforts to support training for peace officers that is designed to improve data collection and reporting.

The guests from the state capitol also heard updates on other major TTI initiatives and toured the agency’s Visibility Research Laboratory.
Motorcycle Safety Forum works to decrease fatalities

More than 100 researchers, law enforcement officers, motorcycle riders, educators and members of government agencies gathered at the seventh annual Motorcycle Safety Forum (MSF) on Feb. 6, 2012, to discuss opportunities and initiatives to reduce motorcycle crashes, injuries and fatalities in Texas.

“The forum is a great chance for lots of agencies and organizations to get together to focus on motorcycle safety,” said Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Traffic Safety Section Director Terry Pence.

This collaborative effort is especially important this year — while experts hoped motorcycle crash fatalities would continue to decline, early 2011 numbers indicate an increase in fatalities. Pence shared some preliminary numbers with attendees, stating that they indicate motorcycle fatalities increased by 9.5 percent from the previous year. He added that motorcycle registrations also increased in 2011.

“Through all our efforts, we have saved a bunch of riders, and seven years ago, that may not have been the case,” Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) Director John Mounce said.

New to this year’s forum was a breakout session where attendees focused on creating an action plan to increase motorcyclist safety in five different areas: safety awareness, education, research, legislation, and roadway design and engineering.

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Forum looks at broad range of safety issues

This year’s forum included the following presentations:

• **NHTSA Motorcycle Safety Initiatives** — Kenneth Copeland, Regional Program Manager, Region VI, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
• **Statewide Motorcycle Safety Initiatives** — Patricia Turner, Associate Research Scientist, CTS
• **Collection and Analysis of Motorcycle Crash Data** — James Lock, Collision Research Associates
• **Rider Conspicuity** — Michael Kellett, Motorcycle Enthusiast
• **What’s New in Training** — John Young, Program Director, Motorcycle and ATV Safety Unit, Texas Department of Public Safety
• **Expanding the Share the Road Program** — Butterfly, State Safety and Awareness Liaison, Texas Confederation of Clubs and Independents

Learn more about motorcycle safety and view Motorcycle Safety Forum presentations at looklearnlive.org.

Top: Michael Kellett, motorcycle enthusiast, talks to attendees about rider conspicuity.

Middle: Bill Allen of TV’s *Hairy Bikers* fame was the forum’s luncheon speaker.

Bottom: Motorcycle Safety Forum attendees listen to Patty Turner speak about statewide motorcycle safety initiatives.
Visibility Research Lab shines light on driving dangers

When you drive at night, you are three times more likely to die in an automobile crash compared to driving during daylight hours. It’s a fact for all age groups, but it’s especially true for teenagers and the elderly. Inexperience and slower reaction times behind the wheel are contributing factors, but one of the main problems associated with nighttime dangers involves changes in our vision.

“When the sun goes down, we all have a harder time with depth perception and seeing the road and the environment around us,” says John Mounce, director of the Center for Transportation Safety. “Throw into the mix the glare from approaching headlights, unfamiliar and poorly lit roadways, as well as older street signs and roadway markings that don’t reflect light well, and you have the makings of a dangerous situation.”

That process of being able to see street signs and pavement markings at night (called retroreflectivity) is a huge factor in nighttime driving safety. Street signs, for example, are made with either small glass beads or micro-sized prisms that reflect light from our headlights back to our eyes. It makes the sign appear bright and more visible.

In March of last year, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) opened a unique Visibility Research Laboratory inside the Institute’s State Headquarters and Research Building on the Texas A&M University campus. The lab is the first of its kind in a university setting and consists of a 125-foot-long corridor that has numerous research capabilities, including the testing of materials used for traffic signs and pavement markings. With the aid of the lab and its equipment, researchers are able to determine if a myriad of nighttime-related products provide adequate visibility without creating glare by being too bright. Researchers can also evaluate the durability of pavement marking materials and the visibility properties of headlamps, roadway lighting and sign lighting.

“We have been busy since we opened the doors,” says Research Engineer Paul Carlson, who manages the new laboratory. Carlson is a nationally known visibility scientist, and his research has led

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Visibility Lab examines challenges of nighttime driving

to significant changes in policies and standards. It was his idea to create an indoor laboratory that would simulate nighttime conditions in a stable environment. After just a year in operation, the Visibility Research Laboratory has already paid for itself.

Carlson’s passion for visibility research was reinforced years ago when he was examining a dark stretch of roadway where experimental markings were being used.

“The product failed and the road was dark and eerie,” Carlson recalls. “You could sort of make out where the road was because of the wheel tracking in the pavement, but it was clear that this was a dangerous environment. It made me realize how important our research really is.”

The Visibility Research Laboratory is a highlight for visitors of TTI. In January, Carlson conducted a tour of the facility for new Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp, who spent most of a day learning about the Institute.

In 2010, CTS released details of a nationwide study showing that even though overall driving deaths have declined, fatalities at night increased. The study was unveiled by researchers with the center’s Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) program who studied data from 1999 to 2008.

“Driving at night is a common risk factor for all drivers, but it is particularly dangerous for young drivers,” TDS Director Russell Henk said of the findings. “When you add the nighttime danger, you create the perfect storm. And, that storm is much more severe for teenage drivers, largely because of their lack of driving experience.”

When the sun goes down, we have a harder time with depth perception and seeing the road and the environment around us. Throw into the mix the glare from approaching headlights, unfamiliar and poorly lit roadways, as well as older street signs and roadway markings that don’t reflect light well, and you have the makings of a dangerous situation.

– John Mounce, Director, Center for Transportation Safety

Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp toured TTI on Jan. 12. Pictured with Sharp, third from left, are Tom Duffy, John Barton, Dennis Christiansen, Gregg Mitchell and David Cain.
CTS program manager picked for Leadership Texas

Melissa Walden, a research scientist at the Texas Transportation Institute’s Center for Transportation Safety (CTS), has been selected for the 2012 class of Leadership Texas — the longest running women’s leadership enhancement program in the nation.

Walden was chosen following a competitive application process that identifies women from all backgrounds and professions who have demonstrated leadership qualities.

“This is an exciting opportunity for me and CTS,” Walden says. “I’ve known many people who have been fortunate enough to have graduated from the program. They all come away from the year-long class inspired about ways to help tackle the numerous issues facing our state.”

As part of the program, class members interact with state and national experts and travel across Texas for five on-site visits — learning about various topics in those regions by touring major businesses, educational institutions and cultural centers. According to its website, “participants increase their understanding of the challenges and opportunities that leaders face in both the private and public sectors.”

Since 1983, Leadership Texas has graduated 3,000 members including “corporate executives, educators, community leaders, lawyers, physicians, allied health professionals, journalists, artists, entrepreneurs and elected officials.”

The first session of Leadership Texas begins in Dallas in March.

“This program will help me establish contacts with leaders from across the state who are not necessarily involved in the field of transportation. I think that will help the Institute broaden its base,” Walden says.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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