



## Memorandum

Date : AUG 5 1988

From : Manager, Community Injury Control (CIC)  
Indian Health Service (IHS)

Subject : Roadway Improvement Program

To : CIC Coordinator  
All Areas

As each of you know, motor vehicle related trauma far exceeds any other cause of unintentional injury death among American Indian people. Further, hospitalization in both IHS and Contract Medical Care for these injuries are lengthy and consequently costly in economic and societal terms. To date, our prevention strategies have been largely directed toward improved use of vehicle safety belts, child restraint devices, pedestrians concerns, and enhanced emergency medical services. Recently, a major initiative aimed at keeping the impaired driver off the roadway was also launched.

Another vitally important component of the motor vehicle crash scenario is the roadway/roadside. Several IHS Areas have utilized the Severe Injury Surveillance System to conduct detailed investigations of motor vehicle crash events. The involvement of the roadway and roadside in either crash initiation or severity of outcome provides additional information to assist in solving this complex injury problem.

The results of a recent motor vehicle crash experience study on a reservation in the Western United States indicates that only one third of almost 200 crash reports occurring on a State route passing through the reservation actually were accounted for in the official State records. Anecdotal accounts from other IHS staff and State officials in other regions indicate this is the norm not the exception.

If public roads on reservations are to be improved, then it is necessary that traffic records be submitted to the respective states and subsequently analyzed for problem locations.

You are strongly encouraged to become familiar with how records are handled by the tribes in your Area as well as State traffic records procedures. In order for this endeavor to be successful, the tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), States, and the IHS must work together. I am investigating this issue of submission and analysis of Indian traffic records at the national level with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will keep you apprised of my findings.

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The issue of records submission to a State agency will not be resolved immediately. Therefore, in the interim the IHS' Environmental Health staff should still offer technical assistance to Indian communities, tribes, local, county, and BIA highway agencies to develop local capability to analyze crash reports, determine problem locations/clusters, and begin to develop a priority list for corrective action.

The FHWA staff at the National level have been very supportive of our efforts to learn more about roadway and roadside features that may contribute to the initiation of crash occurrence or to its severity. Several important training aids have been given to IHS and are available for your use.

Recently members of the Division of Environmental Health met with NHTSA, FHWA, and the BIA highway officials to discuss our activities to date and to foster professional collaboration on this program. Our meeting was very positive and I am optimistic that by working together we can make substantial progress. I would strongly encourage those of you working or anticipating working in this aspect of the motor vehicle injury scenario to make every effort to collaborate with all responsible parties.

As our Headquarters meetings progress I will keep you advised.



Richard J. Smith, R.S.

cc: Clayton Hall, NHTSA  
Warren Harper, FHWA  
James Ball, BIA  
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