

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is attempting to finalize a new safety standard for vehicle design that will attempt to decrease the growing number of pedestrian fatalities in the nation. The proposed changes would require automakers to redesign the hoods and bumpers of the cars they make so they are better able to absorb impact when pedestrians are hit in car accidents.

The current U.S. requirements for vehicle bumpers require them to be strong so that they reduce the cost of repair in crashes. The proposed rules, which are similar to the requirements in other countries, would require bumpers to be weaker and change the focus from lowering the cost of repairs to lowering the rate of pedestrian fatalities.

According to the NHTSA, the number of pedestrian fatalities in the U.S. is increasing. In 2010, 4,300 pedestrians were killed in crashes involving cars or other motor vehicles – a 4% increase from 2009.

## The Benefits of Crash-Avoidance Technology

Automakers are resisting the proposed rules and urging NHTSA to focus on crash-avoidance technology rather than vehicle redesign. Some automakers like BMW and Lexus are equipping cars with computerized technology that attempts to prevent crashes from occurring.

Some of this technology includes systems that audibly warn drivers if car sensors detect a pedestrian in the way and automatic braking systems that cause a car to stop if it senses pedestrians are going to be hit.

The NHTSA thinks that both crash avoidance technology and the vehicle redesign are needed. While the new technology has the ability to reduce some car accidents, it will not stop them all. Pedestrians are still at risk and the new vehicle redesign would help reduce the extent of injuries caused by the car accidents that do occur.

**Source:** USA Today, “Pedestrian deaths rise; NHTSA rules planned,” Jayne O’Donnell, August 5, 2012