Procedures of the National Safety Council Relating to Alcohol and Road Traffic

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The activities of the National Safety Council in this area of Alcohol and Road Traffic are centered about the work of the Committee on Tests for Intoxication of the National Safety Council. I should like to review briefly the work of this committee in order to show how the educational program of the Council is geared to implement the committee’s work.

The Committee on Tests for Intoxication was formed at the 1936 National Safety Congress. Originally, there were 20 committee members, and of these 20 original members, it is remarkable that after 17 years six are still actively serving. Three of these men will appear on the program of the Second International Conference on Alcohol and Road Traffic. Dr. Herman A. Heise, a member of this symposium, is one of the original members of the committee and the other two are Dr. Rolla N. Harger of the Indiana University Medical Center, and Dr. Clarence W. Muehlberger of the Crime Detection Laboratory of Michigan.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to express the debt of gratitude which the National Safety Council owes to these men and to the many others who have since joined forces with the committee, which now numbers 65. These men are doctors, technicians, judges, lawyers, educators, police officials, and representatives of safety organizations and insurance groups. All serve without compensation, and are giving liberally of their time and energies. In total, nine of our present committee members will appear on the program of this Conference.

Deserving of special mention is Dr. H. Ward Smith, Chairman of the program committee of this conference, who is an active member of the Committee on Tests for Intoxication, who has done a great deal to promote the use of tests, and who with others worked successfully for enabling legislation in Canada.

Since its inception, the committee and its individual members have continually carried on research projects in this field. When authoritative information has been gained it has been publicized by the National Safety Council in every way possible. From factual data gathered by the Committee, pamphlets and papers in
usable form have been prepared and
given the widest possible distribution.

Through the Public Information
Conference of the National Safety
Council vital information pertaining
to alcohol and road traffic has been
broadcast by radio and TV networks
and stations, it has been printed in
newspapers and magazines, and it has
been displayed in public service ad-
vertisements across the nation. The
National Safety Council, itself, pub-
ishes nine magazines with national
circulation.

In addition to these somewhat
general public education efforts of a
“shotgun” nature we attempt to
“rifle” information to those who are
in a position to exert considerable
influence in their particular cities and
states. Through the Committee on
Tests for Intoxication and through
the other committees and Conferences
of the National Safety Council, a mail-
ing list of several thousand key people,
officials and other leaders, who can
do a great deal about the problem
locally, has been developed and these
people are provided with a con-
tinuing barrage of information.

In connection with our mention of
state and local officials two important
activities of the National Safety Coun-
cil should be described briefly:

One of these is the Annual Inven-
tory of Traffic Safety Activities. Each
year all forty-eight states submit com-
prehensive reports on their total ac-
tivities directed toward motor vehicle
traffic accident reduction. In 1953, 787
U.S. cities also submitted similar re-
ports. Included in these reports is
specific information as to what is
being done at the state and local level
about the drinking driver and the
drinking pedestrian.

From these city and state reports,
comparative analyses are prepared
and presented in the individual states
and cities. These analyses contain
specific recommendations as to what
should be done to strengthen the pro-
grams. A typical city analysis presen-
tation goes something like this:

A representative of the National
Safety Council meets individually
with the various officials involved and
discusses the various sections of the
analysis in advance of the formal
presentation to the City. This is usual-
ly done on the day preceding the
formal presentation. At the formal
presentation all city officials having
responsibility for traffic control and/or
safety, including the city’s chief
executive, are present. Also present
are representatives of the press, and
selected community leaders. This
group hears at first hand the recom-
mendations contained in the analysis.
A dozen or more copies of the analysis
are presented to the city and are
available for individual or group
study throughout the year.

These analysis presentations pro-
vide a positive method for presenting
authoritative recommendations in-
cluding those which this group here
today is primarily interested in pro-
moting.

Relating specifically to the promo-
tion of Chemical Tests for Intoxica-
tion, the National Safety Council fur-
ther implements its work with city
and state officials by providing a grant
of funds to carry on chemical test
training programs throughout the
country. These funds are adminis-
tered by the Traffic Institute of North-
western University, Chicago, and pro-
vide training for police personnel on
the organization and administration
of the chemical test program. The National Safety Council also provides consultant service to cities and states on all matters pertaining to alcohol and road traffic.

It may be of some interest to review briefly the current status of chemical testing in the United States. The use of chemical tests to determine the degree of intoxication in suspected drinking drivers was reported by some enforcement agency in all but four states in 1952. In two-thirds of the states both the state agency and some city or cities utilized this scientific evidence in the courts. In two states only the state agency used tests, and in 10 states cities used the tests but the state enforcement agency did not.

There was a 52% increase in the number of cities of over 10,000 population which reported using tests in 1952 over the number reported in 1951. Only 242 cities in 37 states used tests during 1951, as compared with 369 cities in 42 states during 1952. These 369 cities represent 27% of all cities over 10,000 population in the United States. This compares favorably with the 18% of the total reported for 1951. These figures, however, despite the substantial increase in the use of tests, point up the problem before us.

This leads me to my major topic of discussion this morning, in bringing to you an account of the National Safety Council’s activities in this area. There are definite limits to what we can do, and to what any National organization can do, from its offices in Chicago, New York, or San Francisco. There is a tremendous need for informed local safety organizations of citizens to generate public opinion in support of sound official action. For public officials alone cannot do the job. However competent and conscientious they may be, and however sound their proposals for more effective traffic control, these proposals are doomed to failure if they go beyond what the public is educated for and willing to accept. A major function of the local citizens’ safety organization must be that of creating a community atmosphere—or psychological climate—in which public officials may discharge fully their responsibilities for public safety.

Such organizations are not theoretical. At the present time there are 86 Class “A” Chapters of the National Safety Council, of which eleven are state organizations. They are located in 43 states and in two provinces of Canada. In addition to these, 110 local safety councils hold membership in the National Safety Council, but do not have Chapter status. Many of these are entirely volunteer organizations and some employ part-time managers.

A National Safety Council Class “A” Chapter is an association of local business and industrial interests, public officials, and responsible community leaders representative of civic and other principal groups, organized to marshal all possible resources for the prevention of accidents. It is administered by a competent, full-time staff. While completely autonomous it must meet national standards for operation developed by the Conference of Local Safety Organizations which is made up of the managers and presidents of the Class “A” Chapters.

Through the Chapter all major community agencies are united for continuous, coordinated work to remove
the causes of accidents. Special emphasis is directed toward securing better traffic regulations and enforcement, and toward the study and promotion of improved traffic facilities and administration. In general other safety councils are patterned after the Chapters.

I believe that there will be general agreement here today that the major problem confronting us, in common with traffic engineers, enforcement officials, and others having responsibility for traffic control, is no longer one of searching out solutions, but rather of finding the means to apply solutions already found. This is not to imply that there is no further need for research, but only to suggest that today there is general agreement on many of the things that are needed in the nation's cities and states to relieve congestion and to reduce, permanently and substantially, street and highway accidents.

For this reason, the National Safety Council is today expending an appreciable effort to help cities and states to help themselves through sound community organization for public action. We believe that through local and state organization lies our best hope for realizing the objective of better and safer living. Where safety councils are active, real progress has been made toward the overall improvement of community life.

Safety Council, cooperating with officials, has been responsible for adoption of the model traffic ordinance, improved traffic courts, modern street illumination, one-way traffic, high school driver training, and for the introduction of chemical tests for intoxication.

These improvements have been brought about by using effectively all media of public information—press, radio, television, motion pictures, outdoor posters, speakers' bureaus which reach all civic and service organizations—and above all, by organizing community leadership to form a hard core of informed public opinion to support actively, needed measures for the control of traffic.

Viewed broadly and compared to numerous other socio-economic problems with which we have been grappling for centuries, traffic problems are new. A new orientation is demanded of the individual and of society. "Safety education" has sometimes been regarded as the dissemination of information as to what the individual can do to avoid personal injury to himself and to others. It is more than that. It should mean education for collective action necessary to bring about improvements in the transportation system. This means educating the public to support better and more uniform motor vehicle legislation, and improved and more intensive traffic law enforcement by police, prosecutors, and courts.

More and stronger local organizations must be developed if we are to bring about the application of sound measures for relief of street traffic accidents and congestion at the grass roots of the traffic problem. The Safety Council is an essential tool for getting the job done.