

# U.S. delays rules on rear visibility for vehicles

- By David Shepardson
- Detroit News Washington Bureau
- [1 Comments](#)

*Washington* - The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Monday it will not meet its latest deadline to set new rear visibility rules that could lead to backup cameras.

It's the fourth delay since Congress approved legislation in 2007 requiring new standards for rear visibility amid concerns about the costs raised by automakers.

The regulation is aimed at helping eliminate blind zones behind vehicles that can hide the presence of pedestrians, especially young children and the elderly.

"The department remains committed to improving rearview visibility for the nation's fleet and will issue a final rule upon completion of the regulatory review process," NHTSA said in a statement.

In a Detroit News interview earlier this month, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said he had hoped to finalize the rules by year's end.

"We have a meeting with the White House about this in the next few days so I hope that they see the importance of this the way we do," LaHood said on Dec. 13.

Congress initially required the new standards by February 2011, but LaHood has exercised his authority to delay the rule.

In January 2012, he again delayed the final rule until Feb. 29 and then in a new letter to Congress, LaHood delayed the regulation until Dec. 31.

NHTSA didn't explain how long the new delay would last or if LaHood is setting a new deadline. The proposal remains under review by the White House Office of Management and Budget, according to a government website.

In 2010, NHTSA acknowledged that on a cost-benefit analysis, the proposal doesn't save money. On a net basis it will add \$700 million to \$1.6 billion in added costs by 2014.

But the agency argues it is still worth the costs.

NHTSA notes that about 100 children age 5 or under die annually in back-up crashes and "there are strong reasons ... to prevent these deaths." More than half of those 100 are 1 year old or younger.

"Many people value the lives of children more than the lives of adults," NHTSA said in its proposal. There is a "recognized general need to protect children given their greater vulnerability to injury and inability to protect themselves."

NHTSA said adding cameras to all vehicles would reduce fatalities in back-up crashes from a range of 95 to 112 annually, and injuries reduced by 7,072 to 8,374.

The law, the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act, is named after a child who was killed when his father accidentally backed over him in the family's driveway.

NHTSA uses a statistical figure of \$6.1 million as the value of a human life and says under a best-case scenario, the proposal will cost between \$11.8 million and \$19.7 million per life saved.

The regulation sets performance standards, but NHTSA believes automobile manufacturers will install rear-mounted video cameras and in-vehicle displays to meet the proposed standards. To meet the requirements of the proposed rule, 10 percent of new vehicles must comply by September 2012, 40 percent by September 2013 and 100 percent by September 2014.

But because of the lengthy delay, the compliance dates would likely be changed.

Backovers kill about 300 people annually and injure 18,000.

It won't be cheap. For vehicles without a display screen — like ones used for navigation — it will add \$159 to \$203 per vehicle. But for vehicles with the display, it will add only \$58 to \$88. Costs may decrease over time.

The proposal would expand the required field of view for all passenger cars, pickup trucks, minivans, buses and low-speed vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of up to 10,000 pounds so drivers can see directly behind the vehicle when the vehicle's transmission is in reverse.

About 44 percent of fatalities involving light vehicles are children under age 5. In addition, 33 percent of fatalities involving light vehicles are elderly people 70 or older.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers CEO Mitch Bainwool and other officials met with the White House Office of Management and Budget in December 2011 to discuss the costs of the rule and urged further study before it was finalized.

The alliance represents Detroit's Big Three automakers, Toyota Motor Corp. and other automakers.

An auto alliance presentation noted that the cost of the regulation per life saved is at least \$11 million under the rear visibility rule, compared with \$9.8 million per life saved under a roof strength regulation and under \$4 million for side impact regulations.

Rearview camera systems are available on 7 in 10 new vehicles, as either standard equipment or an option, the alliance said." When automakers are offering so many attractive technologies to new car shoppers, consumers should choose how best to spend their safety dollars," spokeswoman Gloria Bergquist said earlier this month.

Some automakers — including Honda Motor Co. — have announced plans to make backup cameras standard on all vehicles in the coming years.