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Insurance group says Texans need stricter speeding policies

State's rank of first in auto fatalities prompts demand

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas was ranked first in the country in the number of fatal motor vehicle deaths in 1998, prompting an insurance group yesterday to call on law enforcement officials to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for speeders.

Tom Vinger, Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) spokesman, said that while stopping speeders is a priority, zero-tolerance is impossible.

"What is zero-tolerance? Is it 71? Are we going to pull over everyone who's going 71? I don't think that would go over well," Vinger said.

"You can't argue with reality. The reality is, however, you can't make everyone stop speeding," Vinger said.

In 1998, 3,576 people were killed in 3,160 motor vehicle accidents in Texas, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

California ranked second with 3,112 fatal crashes, followed by Florida with 2,548.

It is up to Texas' 13.4 million licensed drivers to slow down and drive more safely, Vinger said.

Sandra E. Ray of Southwestern Insurance Information Service, the industry trade group that made the zero-tolerance suggestion, said

lowering the fatality rate is the responsibility of drivers and law enforcement. Lower injury accident and fatality rates could result in lower insurance rates, she said.

"I think we need to stop people who are going 1 mph over the speed limit."

— Sandra E. Ray
Southwestern Insurance

"I think we need to increase the amount of troopers who are tracking speeders," Ray said. "It doesn't necessarily just have to be increasing the number of police officers but just start cracking down more. I think we need to stop people who are going 1 mph over the speed limit."

"I don't think law enforcement turns a blind eye to speeders. The only way to truly improve the fatality rate in Texas long term is the people," Vinger said, who noted

the DPS issued 506,067 citations last year. Local law enforcement agencies also issued speeding tickets.

The insurance group is especially concerned about speeding on rural highways.

According to the DPS, 2,048 traffic deaths and 43,934 injuries occurred on rural roads in 1998, accounting for 58 percent of the statewide death toll.

"The speed limit on many rural Texas roads is now 70 mph," Jerry Johns, president of Southern Insurance Information Service, said. "It is a judgment call whether these roads are designed for the speed limit, and it appears 70 mph speed limit on a rural road is a bad judgment call."

Vinger said that more than 96,156 of which 688 were in Texas when they were going under the speed limit but driving too fast for conditions such as bad weather, traffic or dangerous roads.

Both Vinger and Ray said they hope the latest statistics will draw attention of Texas drivers to cause them to use common sense and put the brakes on.

Filmmakers unveil documentary on the 1993 Branch Davidians siege

WASHINGTON (AP) — The filmmakers who spurred renewed interest in the 1993 Waco siege unveiled their findings yesterday in a new documentary that suggests federal agents used an explosive charge to blast into the steel-reinforced concrete bunker where Branch Davidian women and children hid and died.

Among the other startling allegations contained in *Waco: A New Revelation* is that cult members were pinned down by automatic gunfire as flames consumed their retreat on April 19, 1993, cutting off their only route to safety.

The film, produced by Colorado-based MGA Entertainment, was previewed yesterday for reporters and others before it heads for direct-to-video sales and limited theatrical release.

The latest outcry over Waco began earlier this year after the documentary's main researcher, Michael McNulty, discovered a potentially incendiary tear gas canister amid the thousands of pounds of evidence held in storage lockers. That discovery forced FBI and Justice Department officials to recant their longstanding claims that only non-incendiary tear gas was used.

The government insists its agents played no role in the fire or Davidians' deaths. Cult leader David Koresh and some 80 followers perished during the blaze, some from the flames, others from gunshot wounds.

The FBI insisted Wednesday, as it has for six years, that its agents fired no shots during the 51-day siege that stemmed from a botched raid by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

"We are aware of no incidents where gunfire emanated from any law enforcement source," bureau spokesman Bill Carter said. "Our position has not changed."

Carter said he was unfamiliar with the allegation that an explosive device was detonated on the roof of the concrete bunker. He also declined comment about the documentary.

Frederic Whitehurst, a former FBI scientist whose

complaints about shoddy practices in the bureau crime lab led to a scathing inspector general report, narrates the documentary.

The documentary claims

- The Delta Force members served in a tactical role.
- The White Houses' involvement extends beyond what is publicly known.
- The FBI were aware of the Davidians' talk of setting the place aflame.
- Federal agents fired from a helicopter at a Branch Davidian who ventured outside the compound 3 hours before the blaze began.
- Video shows 2 people rolling out from under a tank and firing dozens of rounds at the compound.
- The same video shows that federal forces fired into the compound as it burned.

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