

History of the Enhanced Safety of Vehicles Program (ESV)

The International Experimental Safety Vehicles Program (ESV) originated under NATO's Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society and was implemented through bilateral Memoranda of Understanding between the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) and the governments of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan and Sweden. Participation in the program has expanded over the years and now includes the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Poland and two international organizations - the EEC and the EC.

The participating nations agreed to develop and build "Experimental Safety Vehicles" to advance the state of the art in automotive safety engineering and to hold international conferences periodically to exchange technical information on their programs. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Research and Development program area was designated as the leading governmental organization responsible for the implementation of this program.

Approximately every 2 years, an international conference is held for the purpose of technology exchange in this vital area of motor vehicle safety. As work on experimental safety vehicles was completed, the research program was expanded to cover the entire range of motor vehicle safety. The Conference now serves as an international forum through which progress in motor vehicle safety technology is reported. To reflect this broader scope, at the 1994 Conference, the participating governments approved the change of the Conference name to "The International Technical Conference on the Enhanced Safety of Vehicles (ESV)". The 14th ESV Conference, which was held in Munich, Germany, marked the first use of the new name.

During the 15th ESV Conference, held in Melbourne, Australia, May 1996, a new 5-year priority research program was approved by the participating governments. This program, named International Harmonized Research Activities (IHRA), was launched under the auspices of the ESV Program and consisted of 6 international priority research areas - Biomechanics, Advanced Offset Frontal Protection, Vehicle Compatibility, Pedestrian Impact Protection, Intelligent Transportation, and development of a process to determine Functional Equivalency of Motor Vehicle Regulations. During its regularly scheduled biannual meeting (November 1997) the Steering Committee decided to remove functional equivalency from the priority list.

It was further agreed that all participating countries would coordinate the research activities in these priority areas, and that programs would be under the oversight of a government only Steering Committee, which comprised mainly of the ESV Government Focal Points. Five working groups were formed, each being led by one of the participating governments. The working groups are comprised of government and industry experts. At the 16th ESV Conference, the Steering Committee agreed to add Side Impact as a new research activity. At the 17th ESV Conference the Steering Committee decided to combine the activities of the Advanced Offset Frontal Protection and Vehicle Compatibility groups under one working group.

This highly technical conference provides a unique international forum that focuses attention on a broad range of motor vehicle safety issues and research. The U.S. Department of Transportation through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is responsible for the program initiatives as well as the publication of the ESV conference proceedings, which is considered the most comprehensive publication on the state of automotive safety research available.

The ESV Conference continues to be one of the world's foremost events in the field of motor vehicle safety research having held 17 conferences to date. The 18th ESV Conference is scheduled to be held in Nagoya, Japan, May 19-22, 2003.