

## CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE S4677 *April 29, 2004*

NATIONAL TIRE SAFETY WEEK  
Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I wanted to take the opportunity today to recognize the importance of tire safety during National Tire Safety Week. The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Competition, Foreign Commerce, and Infrastructure, which I chair, has jurisdiction over the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. As such, I am keenly aware of the devastation caused each year on our Nation's highways due to automobile accidents. The National Tire Safety Week, created by the Rubber Manufacturers Association, is now in its third year, and one of a number of their public outreach campaigns designed to focus our efforts on a key issue for all of us: tire safety.

Tires are clearly a core component of an automobile and a key aspect to ensuring the safety of the occupant.

When you stop to think about it, there is only a small patch of rubber on each tire that meets the road at any given moment. That small patch of rubber is responsible for ensuring the automobile maintains control on the roadway.

This function must be maintained no matter what weather conditions exist hot or cold, wet or dry, snowy and icy. Tires are an amazing and highly technical feature of an automobile that is often taken for granted.

Just like changing your oil regularly, tires must also be routinely cared for and inspected in order to maintain their safety. Unfortunately, many drivers unwittingly neglect their tires.

That is why National Tire Safety Week provides us all with a crucial reminder to do the simple things to ensure that our tires are safe.

The result of unsafe tires is simply devastating. Tire blowouts and hydroplaning cause a driver to lose control of the vehicle, which careens out of control, often smashing into other vehicles or flipping over. Tragically, just 3 weeks ago in a small farming community in southern Oregon, a family of five ranging in age from 2 years to 60 years old was killed instantly when the rear tire of their van blew out and the van veered into the path of an oncoming pickup truck. The family was on a last minute outing to gather Easter supplies for their church.

We don't yet know why the tire blew out. It could have been underinflated. Or perhaps the tread was wearing low or uneven and it was more easily punctured by a sharp object in the road.

The bigger question that we need to address

now is, could this accident and tragic loss of life have been avoided? Possibly.

With this in mind, I would like to highlight a small Oregon company, Smart Tread, LLC, who has developed a simple visual tread wear identification system. The Smart Tread proposal advocates for an improved visual identification system that would help consumers better understand when their tires are safe and when they are not. One such approach would use color directly in the tire tread turning yellow and/or red when a tire tread reaches a depth like 2/32 of an inch that is no longer safe and is the legal definition of a bald tire. This system will provide early warnings of a car that is out of alignment or running on overinflated or underinflated tires.

It is my hope that industry and consumers will see the benefit of this tread wear identification system that Smart Tread has developed. We need to continue to improve the safety of tires to prevent unanticipated automobile accidents and deaths. Again, I thank the tire manufacturers for all their efforts and continuing to address this important issue.