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# Airbag Deployment in Low Speed Crashes Increases Injuries

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#### For immediate release: September 28, 2000

Boston, MA--Approximately 50 million vehicles in America, from model years 1986-1997, are equipped with first-generation driver-side airbags. A study by Maria Segui-Gomez, MD, Sc.D., done when she was with the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, finds that the deployment of these airbags in low speed crashes actually increases the likelihood that a driver will be injured. These injuries range from minor to serious and even fatal. Women are more likely to suffer airbag-induced injuries than men.

The study, published in the October issue of *The American Journal of Public Health*, is the first in the peer-reviewed scientific literature to document that first-generation driver-side airbags, while saving lives and preventing serious injury in higher speed crashes, actually increase injuries in lower speed crashes. Segui-Gomez, who is now a faculty member at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, points out that these results may not apply to second-generation airbags, installed beginning in 1998, which were not covered in the study.

The study finds that deployment of airbags at crash speeds below 20 miles per hour increases the likelihood of injury among all drivers. Broken down by gender, the crash speeds are 32 MPH for women and 8 MPH for men. In crashes above those speeds, the airbags have a net protective effect. Below those speeds, they have a net injurious impact.

According to [John Graham](#), Director of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, "These findings about airbags deploying in low speed crashes suggest that airbag suppliers and vehicle manufacturers need to reconsider the setting of airbag deployment thresholds."

The Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, part of The Harvard School of Public Health, is supported by funds from government, industry, and academia. The center's web site may be found at <http://www.hcra.harvard.edu>

The full study is available at <http://www.hcra.harvard.edu/pdf/airbags.pdf>

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