

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

We'll get you home—free

Normally, we send out tow trucks to help save your day. On New Year's Eve, we'll be sending them out to help save your life.

This year we're launching the Tippy Tow program: If you have too much to drink, call AAA and we'll tow you and your car home—at absolutely no cost to you. It doesn't matter whether you're a member or not.

AAA will offer the service from 6 p.m. on New Year's Eve until 6 a.m. on New Year's Day in Northern California, Nevada, and Utah. Party hosts, bartenders, restaurant managers, and drivers can call (800) AAA-HELP to arrange a free tow of up to seven miles.

Keep that number, (800) 222-4357, handy if you think there's any chance you might use it. Simply tell the AAA operator, "I need a Tippy Tow," and a truck will be on its way. Keep in mind that the service excludes rides for passengers and is restricted to a one-way ride for the driver and vehicle to the driver's home. Reservations aren't accepted. Of course, our regular emergency road service—the gold standard for travelers—will also be available,

as it is 365 days a year.

Despite the drop in alcohol-related crashes over the last 10 years, drinking is still a factor in more than 16,000 motor vehicle fatalities each year in the United States. Drunk driving crashes also account for about 60 percent of highway deaths among young people ages 16 to 24. Remember: It takes only one or two drinks to impair vision, steering, braking, judgment, and reaction time.

AAA estimates that a first-time DUI conviction can cost about \$12,000 in fines, penalties, restitution, legal fees, and added insurance expenses. The cost of a collision resulting in injury or death, of course, is incalculable.

Start the new year off right—give us a call. And best wishes for a safe and healthy 2006.



Paula F. Downey
PAULA F. DOWNEY, PRESIDENT

THE ROAD AHEAD THE FUTURE OF HOW WE GET AROUND

TURNED IN BY YOUR WHEEL

Even if you have had several glasses of wine, you might believe you can still drive safely. But in the future, you may be overruled by your car. Dennis Bellehumeur of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has invented a sensor for steering wheels that can detect blood alcohol levels through the driver's skin. If your steering wheel determines, when you grip it, that you're beyond the legal limit, it keeps your car from starting.

Bellehumeur, a neuroclinical psychologist, says that many of his patients had been injured in drunk driving incidents. But he got the idea for his steering wheel after his teenage son drank and then drove

into a concrete pole. Breath-activated ignition lock systems can be tricked (a passenger, rather than the driver, can breathe into the analyzer), but a steering wheel must be held by the actual driver. The Canadian auto parts supplier K.S. Centoco makes the alcohol-detecting wheel. What's next? "I'm meeting with legislators to excite them about requiring it," says Bellehumeur. "There has been a lot of interest." So far, he has taken his idea to lawmakers in New York, Florida, and Michigan.

HANDS FREE: FAR FROM RISK FREE

A driver who chats on the phone is safer with a hands-free device—right?

Wrong. A study published in the *British Medical Journal* last August concludes that a person talking on a phone while driving is four times more likely to have a crash resulting in injury, no matter whether the phone is handheld or hands free.

In a separate study, researchers at Johns Hopkins University suggest a reason. They placed volunteers in an MRI scanner and monitored brain activity as each volunteer viewed a series of letters and digits while also listening to spoken letters and digits through headphones. The result? "When they shifted their attention from vision to hearing, activity in the visual parts of the brain decreased,"

observes lead researcher Steven Yantis. "It's like having volume knobs for perception. You can turn up the volume on vision and ignore hearing, or vice versa, but you can't really do both simultaneously. These effects are associated with where your mind is, not your manipulation of the phone."



**CALIFORNIA STATE
AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION**

OFFICERS

CHAIR OF THE BOARD Daniel K. Whitehurst
VICE CHAIR OF THE BOARD Robert N. Barone

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Robert N. Barone RENO, NEVADA
Paula R. Collins SAN FRANCISCO
Edgar H. Grubb WALNUT CREEK
Norma J. Howard NOVATO
Sylvester Lucena CHICO
Alistair W. McCrone ARCATA
Wayne R. Moon CARMEL
Kenneth Nilsson MONTEREY
Wendy Paskin-Jordan SAN FRANCISCO
James R. Pouliot SAN FRANCISCO
Estelle G. Saltzman SACRAMENTO
Leo Soong WALNUT CREEK
Vivian M. Stephenson SAN FRANCISCO
Stephen H. Wainwright MERCED
Shirley A. Ward SANTA ROSA
Daniel K. Whitehurst ST. HELENA
Robert E. Wilcox ALPINE, UTAH
Kline A. Wilson Jr. OAKLAND

HONORARY DIRECTORS

Victor K. Atkins SANTA BARBARA
Rudy V. Balma REDDING
John M. Bryan PIEDMONT
Jack Craemer SAN RAFAEL
Harmon K. Howard WALNUT CREEK
Ronald R. James SAN JOSE
John T. Kehoe SACRAMENTO
Frank MacBride Jr. SACRAMENTO
Stephen G. Magyar PACIFIC GROVE
William E. McNeany SANTA ROSA
Martin C. Nelsen FRESNO
Patrick O'Melveny ATHERTON
William M. Otterson MERCED
Jeanne M. Payne VALLEJO
Donald J. Romeo, M.D. LAS VEGAS
Ivan L. Suess LODI
Jean R. Wente LIVERMORE

CLUB OFFICERS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER James R. Pouliot
PRESIDENT Paula F. Downey
TREASURER William A. Smith
SECRETARY Jamie E. Chung