



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on February 29, 2012

Regulators Plan to Mandate Rearview Cameras in Cars by 2014

Federal regulators are proposing more intervention in the U.S. automobile industry, as new safety regulations would require automakers to furnish all new vehicles with rearview cameras by 2014. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will be transmitting a final copy of the proposed regulation to Congress today — which is expected to be approved — after the rule was originally proposed in 2010.



Citing a statistic indicating that 228 people die in the United States every year due to “backover drivers,” regulators argue that the new installations are critical for pedestrian safety. “We haven’t done anything else to protect pedestrians,” [said](#) Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety in Washington. “This is one thing we can do and should do.”

According to government estimates, the rule will cost auto manufacturers between \$160 and \$200 per vehicle to install the cameras and viewing screens — costing the industry \$2.7 billion annually — and some of the cost will likely be transferred to consumers through higher sticker prices. The move is not the first time the federal government has intervened in auto manufacturing, as safety features such as air bags and the Liddy Light — the central third brake light which was named for Elizabeth Dole — have also been mandated by the government.

Regulators claim that 95 to 112 deaths and more than 8,000 injuries will be avoided each year by eliminating the “blind spots” in rearview mirrors that drivers often overlook. “In terms of absolute numbers of lives saved, it certainly isn’t the highest,” Ditlow affirmed. “But in terms of emotional tragedy, backover deaths are some of the worst imaginable. When you have a parent that kills a child in an incident that’s utterly avoidable, they don’t ever forget it.”

The regulation has been hailed by safety advocates who say the mandate is long overdue. “We wouldn’t buy a car if we couldn’t see 30 or 40 feet going forward,” asserted Janette Fennell, founder of [KidsAndCars.org](#), a safety advocacy group that pushed heavily for the regulation. “We’re taking this big lethal weapon going in reverse, and we can’t see.”

But while safety advocates are touting the proposal as the greatest idea since sliced bread, many critics are asking, should the government really get involved? Moreover, in terms of evolutionary competitive growth, is government intervention even necessary for consumers to benefit from such safety features? For 2012 models, 45 percent of vehicles already offer rearview cameras as standard features and 23 percent offer the add-on as an optional feature, according to auto research website [Edmunds.com](#).



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Over time, safety features become more prevalent and more technologically advanced, *without* the pressure of government intervention. The competitive market has prompted the development of countless safety features, as such offerings become more and more important to consumers who are shopping for new vehicles. At last year's [Los Angeles Auto Show](#), manufacturers showcased a host of new safety technologies, not one of which is currently mandated by the government. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* reported last November:

Infiniti presented one solution with its Infiniti JX, unveiled last week at the auto show. The JX boasts the world's first backup collision intervention technology. Like existing backup sensors, the system beeps if it detects potential obstacles while the vehicle is in reverse. But now, if the driver does not respond, the system automatically brakes to prevent a collision. ...

The new Ford Explorer on display at the auto show also integrates lane-departure technology. In addition, the Explorer features inflatable seat belts — a first in the industry — designed to reduce chest and neck injuries. Other safety options include blind-spot warnings and an automatic parallel-parking system.

While regulators claim the rearview camera installations will cost around \$200, some critics find the estimate far too modest. "Manufacturers plan features and designs years in advance," [writes](#) Travis Okulski at BusinessInsider.com. "With 2013 cars already starting to roll off the production line, this leaves a very short turnaround for the automakers to include the technology in current and upcoming models." With that in mind, the \$200-estimate could be gravely askew, he contended, explaining,

On the surface the tech may be cheap, but re-engineering the car to accommodate a video screen and camera will cost more money than that, especially since product designs and features are almost certainly locked in for 2014. The cost of changing cars that are not slated to be equipped with rearview cameras will almost certainly be higher than the \$200 estimate.

Furthermore, the issue travels far beyond just locating a blind spot in the rear window of a vehicle. The regulation does not involve a design failure or a concern over product quality. It's a government-mandated technological add-on that dictates private engineering — and the effectiveness of the rule is questionable.

There are several elements in play — one being a societal change. For instance, a rearview camera will not ameliorate the carelessness of a driver who is Facebooking, tweeting, or checking their text messages while simultaneously backing out of their driveway. In fact, a camera may give them the comfort to indulge their electronic devices even more. The point is that no regulation will cure human error.

In effect, the NHTSA is proposing a regulation that will cost \$27 million annually for the chance of preventing a single backover death. To put this into perspective, for [about \\$2,000](#) one life could be saved by funding and dispersing insecticide-treated anti-malarial mosquito nets in Africa. So the \$2.7 billion that federal regulators are proposing to purportedly shield 100 American pedestrians could save the lives of 1.3 million Africans.



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