



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

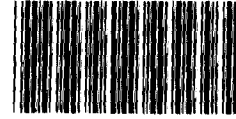
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COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

JAN 16 1981

Letter on Form 103

Ms. Joan Claybrook, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
Department of Transportation



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Dear Ms. Claybrook:

On April 17, 1979, we wrote you expressing several of our concerns about the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's accident data collection efforts. One of our concerns was that the Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS) annual reports were consistently late. We stated:

"FARS information is untimely, as the annual reports covering 1975, 1976, and 1977's highway fatalities were not issued until 10 to 11 months after each reporting year had ended. Such delays have caused members of the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives to question whether accident data which in part is nearly 2 years old by the time it is published is worth the cost."

In your June 4, 1979, response to this concern, you stated:

"You are correct; reporting has not been as timely as we would like it to be. It will be better. Since the implementation in 1978 of a remote data entry system for submitting data to the FARS, submission of data has been more timely than in past years. The annual report for the 1978 data will be available in July 1979. We are now approaching our goal of submission of accidents within one month of the date of their occurrence."

We believe the situation has not really improved; in fact, it is currently worse. The 1978 FARS annual report, issued in September 1979, was delayed 2 months


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beyond your estimated issuance date but was nevertheless ahead of the prior years' issuance dates. The 1979 FARS annual report, however, is still not available to the public despite your January 9, 1981, news release stating that copies may now be obtained. Furthermore, the Safety Administration's National Center for Statistics and Analysis and its Distribution Services state that it may be at least 3 or 4 weeks before copies of the 1979 FARS annual report are available. This is more than 12 months after the reporting year ended.

We maintain, as we did in our April 1979 letter, that the accident data becomes less useful as its release is delayed. We hope that in the future the Safety Administration will explore every means possible to speed up its FARS data collection efforts, so that the results can be disseminated as quickly and as accurately as possible.

We would appreciate hearing from you on any actions you are taking to resolve this problem.

Sincerely yours,


Herbert R. McLure
Associate Director