University of Iowa News Release

May 7, 2008

Study to examine older drivers and assistive technology

A federal grant will help University of Iowa researchers determine whether modern technology can help older drivers to drive more safely.

Researchers at the National Advanced Driving Simulator (NADS) -- a research and teaching unit of the UI College of Engineering -- have received a $604,432 grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to explore technology with the potential to assist older drivers.

The 18-month study will be directed by Robert Wallace, M.D., and James Torner, professors of epidemiology in the UI College of Public Health, and Dawn Marshall, researcher at the NADS, using drivers age 65 and older. Older drivers constitute not only the fastest growing segments of the population and the driving public, but also represent an age group with an elevated risk of fatalities per vehicle mile traveled.

"Older drivers have higher crash rates at intersections," said Marshall. "A system that helps them negotiate intersections safely could save lives."

The study will examine in-vehicle systems that warn older drivers when they are about to run a stop sign or red light and assist them in negotiating intersections after coming to a stop. The grant also calls for NHTSA to secure a small NADS simulator, called a "MiniSim," for use at NHTSA headquarters to support ongoing NADS and NHTSA collaborative research efforts.

Omar Ahmad, NADS assistant director, said that the study is the latest research activity in a long line of cooperative projects between the university and NHTSA.

Located at the University of Iowa Research Park, NADS is the most sophisticated research-driving simulator in the world. Developed for NHTSA, it offers the highest fidelity real-time driving simulation experience. The NADS mission is to conduct and support simulator-based research and motor vehicle systems research with the goal of enhancing the safety of U.S. highways and improving the safety and productivity of the vehicle-manufacturing sector. The NADS vision is to achieve these goals in collaboration with academia, government, and industry through the advancement of multidisciplinary simulation science and technology.

STORY SOURCE: University of Iowa News Services, 300 Plaza Centre One, Suite 371, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-2500

MEDIA CONTACTS: Omar Ahmad, NADS, 319-335-4788, oahmad@nads-sc.uiowa.edu; Gary Galluzzo, University News Services, 319-384-0009, gary-galluzzo@uiowa.edu