

## Suppliers: Better headlights save lives

By [Harry Stoffer](#)

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**WASHINGTON** -- It has become an article of faith in the auto industry: Safety sells.

Suppliers of automotive lighting are the latest to argue that selling more of their advanced products would save lives. At the top of their list: xenon lamps, also known as high-intensity-discharge lighting, or HID.

The suppliers work together as the Motor Vehicle Lighting Council. They say better headlamps would prevent some of the 2,300 pedestrian deaths that occur each year on U.S. roads during hours of darkness.

"What we would like is better awareness" of the potential benefits of improved vehicle lighting, says Daniel Robusto, chairman of the supplier council. Robusto is CEO of North American Lighting Inc., of Flora, Ill.

If buyers demand better lights, automakers will install them on more vehicles, the suppliers say. Too often, they contend, car companies offer advanced lighting only in costly luxury packages.

### Low penetration

In North America, just over 5 percent of new 2005 cars and trucks were sold with xenon lamps, the lighting council says. That compares with more than 13 percent in Europe and 32 percent in Japan.

By the 2008 model year, the percentages are projected to be 6.3 percent in North America, 16.5 percent in Europe and 47 percent in Japan, the council says.

"Penetration rates are not what they should be" in North America, Robusto says.

Suppliers charge automakers two to three times as much for xenon lamps as they do for the more common halogen headlights, they say. But xenon bulbs last several times longer than halogen lights, they note.

Suppliers say xenon bulbs also provide about 70 percent more light output and a wider beam.



The 2005 Chevrolet Corvette has xenon headlamps.

### Let there be (more) light

Xenon bulb sales as percentage of total headlight market

	2005	2008*
<b>North America</b>	5.1	6.3
<b>Europe</b>	13.5	16.5
<b>Japan</b>	32	47.1
<b>Other</b>	2.6	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>53.2</b>	<b>75.2</b>

\* Projected

Source: Motor Vehicle Lighting Council

They claim the bulbs create less glare for oncoming motorists, despite complaints federal safety officials receive about the bluish headlights.

HID systems produce light by creating an arc inside a gas mixture that includes xenon. Other lights use an electrified filament.

### **Night dangers**

The suppliers back their safety argument with data from the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

Michael Flannagan, research associate professor at UMTRI, told reporters in Washington this month that night driving is more dangerous than daytime driving. Aside from vision difficulties caused by darkness, more nighttime drivers have been drinking alcohol or are tired, he says.

Studies show that better lights at night do not reduce most kinds of multi-vehicle crashes, rollovers and run-off-the-road wrecks, Flannagan says. But they can keep drivers from hitting pedestrians, he says.

Lighting suppliers also tout adaptive lighting. Those systems rotate light beams in the direction the steering wheel is turned.

Leaders of the lighting council say they are concentrating on informing consumers and automakers. For now, they are not asking regulators to require advanced lighting systems.

The suppliers are working with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on a rewrite of the federal vehicle lighting standard. They say they expect NHTSA to propose the revised version soon.

The aim is to clean up frequently amended language, not to impose new mandates, the suppliers say. But they may petition for regulations on improved lighting later, they add.

NHTSA considered a consumer rating system for vehicle lighting. It no longer gives the matter a high priority.

The lighting council's members produce almost all of the headlamps for North America. The council is part of the Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association.