

Autonomous Emergency Braking: Euro NCAP's Perspective

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Interview with Michiel van Ratingen, Secretary General, Euro NCAP

How satisfied should consumers be with the progress being made in car safety?

There has been enormous progress in safety in the 15 years since Euro NCAP was launched, but progress should not be taken for granted. In 2011, more than 31,000 people lost their lives on European roads and around 1.3 million suffered serious injuries. We cannot accept this when technology now exists to prevent many of these accidents. Many crashes are caused due to distraction, poor visibility or simple human error, the driver fails to brake, brakes much too late or just does not apply the brakes hard enough. Euro NCAP has worked with carmakers and safety researchers to understand which technologies have the greatest potential benefit for safety. It is clear that Autonomous Emergency braking technology could save lives on a scale that other technologies cannot achieve. Initial estimates indicate that around 8,000 lives a year could be saved by the technology.

What is Autonomous Emergency Braking?

Autonomous Emergency Braking refers to a number of technologies that can act independently of the driver in an emergency situation, applying the brakes to avoid or mitigate an accident. They help to avoid accidents by identifying critical situations early and warning the driver. They also reduce the severity of crashes which cannot be avoided by lowering the speed of collision and, in some cases, by preparing the vehicle and restraint systems for impact. Most use radar to identify potential obstacles ahead of the car, some use cameras. This information is combined with data about the car's speed and trajectory to determine whether or not a critical situation is developing. If a potential crash is detected, the systems generally first try to warn the driver. If no action is taken, the system then applies the brakes with the aim of reducing the speed at which the collision takes place.

Why is Euro NCAP promoting this technology now?

Autonomous Emergency Braking will save lives on a large scale. The technology is mature and available, but uptake is slow because public awareness is poor and the information they receive from car companies is not always clear. Euro NCAP conducted a comprehensive survey of which new cars in Europe offer AEB technologies. In the course of our research we realised how very difficult it is for consumers to find out if the technology is available and what it does exactly. Information about them is often vague, buried deep on websites, usually under obscure brand names. The results of the survey, published today, confirm what we expected. It is mainly high-end models that offer the technology, although it is encouraging to see that it is available on some more affordable cars from companies such as Honda, Ford and VW. Carmakers are ready to make the change, but consumers need more information to understand that Autonomous Emergency Braking is a valuable addition to a vehicle. We want the technology to come as standard on all new cars.

How will Euro NCAP do to make things less confusing for consumers?

Firstly, we want to encourage carmakers to bring autonomous emergency braking into vehicles faster. From 2014 onwards the technology will be an integral part of Euro NCAP's safety ratings. We are giving car companies two to three years to put the technology on cars, if they want to keep their five star ratings. Secondly, we are working on ways to determine which types of system are the most effective. Currently, some work at 5-30km/h, some at 30-200km/h, some at 70-200km/h. It's impossible for consumers to make direct comparisons. Euro NCAP is working on ways to assess the different technologies thoroughly. In the meantime, consumers are invited to visit www.euroncap.com to find out which models have these life-saving systems.