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Sept. 27, 2010

Carnegie-Knight News21/Center for Public Integrity Investigation of Transportation Safety Published by The Washington Post and msnbc.com

A major investigation into transportation safety in America, conducted by journalism students from 11 universities participating in the Carnegie-Knight Journalism Initiative in partnership with the Center for Public Integrity, will be published this week by msnbc.com and The Washington Post.

The 23-story multimedia package comes from News21, a journalism initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation of Miami to promote in-depth and innovative journalism. CPI is a Washington-based nonprofit investigative journalism organization.

The News21/CPI investigation found:

- The National Transportation Safety Board, the federal panel charged with investigating accidents and proposing ways to prevent them, has essentially given up on 1,952 of its safety recommendations – one of every six it has made since 1967.
- Federal agencies, states and transportation industries are taking longer than ever to act on NTSB recommendations. Over the past decade, the average number of years to implement recommendations went from 3.4 to 5.4 years.
- More than 2,300 people have been killed from ice buildup on aircraft, problems on runways, faulty aircraft maintenance and repairs, and overtired pilots, despite dozens of NTSB recommendations to address those problems.
- Over the past four decades, more than 320 fatigue-related accidents and incidents have taken nearly 750 lives in airplane crashes alone. The NTSB has issued 138 fatigue-related safety recommendations since 1967. Only 68 have been implemented.
- For four decades, the NTSB has investigated accident after accident that investigators said could have been prevented with automated train control technology. Had railroads installed such a system, more than 780 accidents might have been averted.

- Since the NTSB recommended safety management systems in 2002, there have been about 1,700 accidents involving domestic passenger vessels. Many of them could have been prevented if safety systems had been in place.

The News21 students were based at Arizona State University for 10 weeks this summer under the direction of top faculty members from ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and CPI data researchers.

"News21 is training the best young men and women to successfully employ innovative 21st century technologies and become both nimble and effective journalism practitioners in a relentless – and endless – news cycle that competes for audience attention 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week," said Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation who with Knight President and CEO Alberto Ibargüen created the Carnegie-Knight Journalism Initiative. "These young journalists are learning to practice their craft at the cutting edge of the 'new' news business, which must figure out how to adapt to the realities of online media and adopt its most successful practices while not falling victim to its worst."

The Carnegie-Knight News21/CPI project included not only 23 news stories, but dozens of accompanying photos, videos and interactive graphics.

"Student journalists, with the right teachers, are capable of not just producing major investigative stories, but doing them in new, innovative ways," said Eric Newton, vice president of Knight Foundation's journalism program. "News21 shows that journalism schools have a role in the future of news – that they need not be the caboose of America's news train but instead can be an engine of change. By using their work, leading news organizations are agreeing that these schools indeed have something special to offer."

The News21/CPI investigation was led by Kristin Gilger, a veteran editor and associate dean of the Cronkite School. Cronkite faculty members Leonard Downie Jr., the former executive editor of The Washington Post who holds the Weil Professorship, Knight Chair Steve Doig, Cronkite News Service Director Steve Elliott and Dean Christopher Callahan assisted with the project.

"This project shows what a group of smart student reporters can do when given time, resources and guidance," Gilger said. "This distribution of university-produced content by two of the world's major news organizations is unprecedented."

Downie said: "I was very impressed by the talent, determination and multimedia skills of these outstanding student reporters who, in collaboration with the Center for Public Integrity, produced professional-quality accountability journalism on a tight deadline about a challenging subject of great importance to all Americans."

The Center for Public Integrity played a key role in conceptualizing the project.

"America's transportation safety apparatus is badly broken," said Bill Buzenberg, the center's executive director. "Recommendations ignored; cases closed without resolution. Our joint

investigation clearly shows what's wrong with the system. It's mind-boggling to think how many lives could be saved if we just did things right."

Michael Pell, the center's deputy data editor, and staff writer Nick Schwellenbach provided data analysis and support.

News21 reporters traveled across the country and to Canada and Mexico, interviewed hundreds of government officials, industry leaders, safety experts and accident victims and analyzed thousands of documents.

"In today's millisecond news cycle, News21 was a truly unique opportunity," said Aarti Shahani, a graduate student from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. "We each had the resources to spend an entire summer digging into transportation safety and uncover facts that were new to the agencies themselves and reporters on this beat. I learned the most from traveling the country to interview regular people who lost loved ones in avoidable accidents."

The News21 reporters were:

- Jennifer Brookland, Columbia University
- Richie Duchon, University of Southern California
- Ben Giles, University of Maryland
- Charlie Litton, University of Nebraska
- Andrew Maclean, Syracuse University
- Stephanie Mathieu, University of Missouri
- Tessa Muggeridge, Arizona State University
- Ryan Phillips, University of California
- Robin Schwartz, University of Texas
- Aarti Shahani, Harvard University
- Ariel Zirulnick, University of North Carolina

The website and multimedia support came from Maclean, Cronkite students Jennifer Matthews and Brandon Quester and Cronkite staff Britton Halle, Lily Ciric-Hoffman, Micah Jamison and Caige Nichols.

About the Carnegie Corporation of New York

Carnegie Corporation of New York, which was established by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 "to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding," is one of the oldest, largest and most influential of American grantmaking foundations. The foundation makes grants to promote international peace and to advance education and knowledge. For more information, visit: carnegie.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation

focuses on projects that promote informed and engaged communities and lead to transformational change. For more information, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

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