

Fessler hails truck, boat, firefighter laws

Truck safety, boat safety, firefighter training safety — Sen. Richard Fessler says he had a pretty productive year in 1988.

Gov. James Blanchard signed a 12-bill truck safety package that was sponsored in part by Fessler, R-Commerce, who chairs the Senate State Affairs, Tourism and Transportation Committee.

"This is the most comprehensive package of truck safety bills ever enacted in Michigan," said Blanchard at the signing ceremony, "and one of the strongest in the country."

Fessler's boating safety measure was passed 102-0 by the House of Representatives and awaits the governor's signature.

A firefighter measure also passed the House by a similar margin.

"SOMETHING HAD to be done to control the rise in truck-related accidents," Fessler said. AAA Michigan generated 165,000 pieces of mail to lawmakers in a 2½-year effort.

A key bill sets up a truck driver safety fund to train drivers in basic driving and inspection skills, the senator said.

Other bills in the package call for:

- Covers on truck loads.
- Operating brakes on all wheels.
- Trucks bumpers that extend to within 22 inches of the ground (when federal legislation is enacted with such a requirement).
- Annual state police inspections of vehicles hauling flammable materials.
- Fines of up to \$300 of truck owners each time they allow a driver to operate equipment with a safety defect.
- An expanded truck accident form.
- Allowing the Public Safety Commission to fine carriers for PSC violations — expected to yield up to \$2.1 million a year for the truck safety fund.
- Restricting trucks to the two right lanes on highways having three or more lanes in each direction.
- Requiring truck owners to place a logo or identification on the side of each vehicle.
- Increasing truck registration fees by \$15 for the truck safety fund.

Other area sponsors of the package are Reps. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, and James Kosteiva, D-Canton.

A NEW MARINE Safety Commission will be set up under a bill sponsored by Fessler.

He said the 15-member commission, under the Department of Natural Resources recreational division, will be able to review boating accidents and study marine safety education programs.

"Boating is a favorite summer activity of many Michigan residents," said Fessler, whose district includes the lakes area of western Oakland County. "Unfortunately, our lakes are not as safe as they could be, and deaths and severe injuries occur every summer."

He said marine safety is further complicated by the growing popularity of jet skis and sail boards on lake traffic.

A THREE-BILL package to improve firefighting safety was prompted by the death of three Milford-area firefighters during a training session in an aid house.

Fessler and Sen. Michael O'Brien, D-Detroit, co-sponsored the bills, which have passed the House. The measures will:

- Direct the Fire Fighter Training Council to review state and federal standards on live fire training exercises in structures. That council then would make recommendations to the General Industry Safety Standards Commission.
- Deal with liability for instructors. Instructors certified by the Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council won't be held liable for mishaps occurring during standard training procedures.
- Provide the same protection for training centers, such as colleges and universities.

Ethnic intimidation bill finally passes

A bill punishing "ethnic intimidation" got final state House of Representatives passage Thursday and is on its way to Gov. Blanchard's desk for a signature.

The House voted 67-20 to concur in Senate amendments. Another 23 members were absent. All Observer & Eccentric area lawmakers who were present voted yes.

"The Senate watered it down, but it's better than nothing," said the sponsor, Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield.

Under House Bill 4113, a person who commits a crime motivated, partially or wholly, by race, color, religion or national origin would be subject to punishments added on to other sentences.

"The theory is to add on greater punishment because it does greater harm to the fabric of society... than if the crime were just a random act of destruction or trespass," said Honigman.

He introduced the bill 1½ years ago, modelling it after a federal statute known as the "Anti-Klan Act."

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