Big Brother Takes the Wheel

Meaghan Ziemba, Associate Editor, PD&D

Is placing black boxes in automobiles really an invasion of the driver's privacy?

While I am all for the advancement of automobile safety, I wonder if placing black boxes in a cars is stepping over the privacy boundary? A recent article, "Black Boxes in Cars Raise Privacy Concerns" [1] discussed the placement of event data recorders, also known as black boxes, being placed in new cars and light trucks – such a development caused me to raise an eyebrow.

What is contemporary privacy? With most people freely exposing their 'private' lives via Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Instagram, and all the other available apps out there, is one tiny black box, meant for determining the cause of an accident, really that invasive? People are already supporting similar practices by installing snapshot from Progressive Car Insurance [2].

If drivers are following the laws of the road, and driving carefully, the information fed into the data recorder doesn't even get looked at. However, if an individual does get into a wreck, the information that the little black box contains actually might help someone's case instead of hindering them. After all, if it proved your innocence, would play the 'invasion of privacy' card then? Probably not.

We seem to have a double-edged sword.

According to the article, the traffic safety administration wants to expand the data requirement to include as many as 30 additional types of data, but so far has not put any limits on how the information can be used. The article also notes on how auto manufacturers have being using data recorders for years to not only protect themselves against liabilities, but to help them improve certain technologies that would make the automobiles safer.

For those of you concerned about your privacy, the article focuses on what Rep. Bill Shuster from Pennsylvania says, "Many of us would see it as a slippery slope toward big government and Big Brother knowing what we're doing and where we are."

Right, because Big Brother has no idea where we are every time we pull out our smartphones and other mobile devices; especially when we use navigation applications? Here's another troubling fact: Cellphone carriers responded to 1.3 million demands for subscriber information in 2011 ("More Demands on Cell Carriers in Surveillance" N.Y. Times [3]).

Before people want to start questioning whether or not their privacy is being invaded, they need to make sure they are not plastering their private information all over the Internet for everyone else to see. While the justifications for the black box

are a bit abstruse, I acknowledge with the benefits the proposal offers not only to automobile manufacturers, but to the victims who may be involved in horrible traffic accidents.

This technology could also help decrease the number of drunk-driving incidents. If some drivers know that they are being watched, they may be more careful with their choices before getting behind the wheel.

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