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EU expected to propose new safety rules for cars

Associated Press updated 12:44 p.m. ET May 21, 2008

BRUSSELS, Belgium - The European Commission is expected this week to propose new legislation to improve car safety.

The EU's executive body will call for the mandatory installation of new safety features including Electronic Stability Control, or ESC, which helps prevent skidding, according to a draft of the proposal obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press.

ESC senses when a driver may lose control of the vehicle and automatically applies brakes to individual wheels to help keep it stable and avoid a rollover.

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The technology helps motorists avoid skidding across icy or slick roads or keep control of their car when swerving to avoid an unexpected object in the road.

The EU proposal will have to be approved by governments of the 27 member nations and the European Parliament.

It will also call for manufactures to install tire pressure monitoring systems on passenger cars and advanced emergency braking systems and lane departure warning systems on trucks. The Commission is expected to make the proposal Friday.

Road safety campaigners have long called for the EU to make ESC standard on cars.

"This is very good news in Europe because we have fallen behind the U.S. on use of Electronic Stability Control, which is the most important car safety device since the seat belt," said David Ward of the FIA Foundation, a campaign group supported by the governing body for world auto sport.

In a statement, the foundation said installing the system could save thousands of lives in Europe.

It said only 48 percent of new cars being sold in Europe were already being fitted with the system, compared with 53 percent in the United States. Although ESC is sold as standard on many higher-end cars, it is often only offered as an option in cheaper vehicles.

The EU proposal is expected to give manufacturers at least two years to

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phase in the new rules.

In the United States, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will require all vehicles to have such systems by the end of 2012.

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