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Inventor's crusade against road debris

10:34 AM PDT on Saturday, April 9, 2005

By LAURIE LUCAS / The Press-Enterprise

Angel V. Rivera took a load off his mind by designing a product to keep a load off the road.

His Corona-based business has a simple safety mission: reducing road debris. His invention, the Load-Helper LLC, is basically a bag that fits over the end of a bundle of lumber, pipes or other cargo on a truck bed or rack. The durable nylon bag is secured by pulling tie-down straps through the bag's loops. Once secured by Load-Helper, individual pieces of lumber or pipes can't slide out of the bundle and on to the road.

His cargo enclosures come in three sizes (12 x 14, 10 x 15 and 6 x 8, priced at \$55.99, \$45.99 and \$35.99, respectively). There's a built-in red warning flag and a pouch for easy storage.

Rivera, 43, whose patent is pending, is a home repairman. "Half the time I didn't know if the lumber I carried on my rack was secure enough," said the Highland resident. "Thank goodness I've never lost anything."

Fed up with loose loads, he began developing a prototype last June. The results of a 2004 study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety goaded him on when he learned that junk on America's roadways causes more than 25,000 wrecks and more than 80 deaths a year.

"We've evaluated the Load-Helper and it does what it claims to do," said Steve Mazor, an automotive engineer based in Diamond Bar for the AAA of Southern California. "We're not endorsing it, but it's one way of properly securing cargo."

The most common types of debris include tire treads, garbage, construction supplies, mufflers and automotive parts. For much of the litter, AAA officials blame trucks that are carrying unsecured loads buffeted by strong winds. Even something as routine as a sofa being hauled in the back of a pickup truck can pose a threat.

Rivera was moved by the plight of a 25-year-old woman in



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The Load-Helper is designed to secure cargo by enclosing it.

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Washington, Maria Federici (www.mariasmiracle.com), who was blinded and disfigured last year. A 50-pound piece of furniture flew off the back of a rental trailer on the interstate, smashing her windshield.

To the outrage of many, the man who was hauling the furniture was given only two traffic citations. Now there's a push for a Washington state law that would punish anyone whose road debris caused injury or death with up to one year in jail and compensate the victim. Rivera thinks California should draft a similar bill.

"I want to prevent accidents and save lives," Rivera says. Working with a manufacturer in New Mexico, he invested \$37,000

He's talking to several large home improvement chains and the QVC shopping channel about carrying his product.

You can order from his Web site, www.load-helper.com, or call (800) 819-1142.

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