

Traffic Safety



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State safety officials respond to report on drunk driving

A new report on drunk driving has spurred heightened efforts to combat this national problem.

A Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration report released April 23 showed 15.1 percent of the nation's drivers ages 18 and older drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year. The study, "State Estimates of Persons Aged 18 or Older Driving under the Influence of Alcohol or Illicit Drugs," is based on data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The estimates are annual averages based on combined data collected from 127,283 current drivers surveyed in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

States in the upper Midwest showed the most drivers who admitted to having driven under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year. Wisconsin topped the list with 26.4 percent (see chart). Meanwhile, Utah had the lowest level of admitted drunk drivers, followed by West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Arkansas.

In Wisconsin, news about the report was not a surprise, but state officials were disappointed with the numbers, said Dennis Hughes, chief of safety programs for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. "Every state has a problem with drinking, and it really is a matter of perspective and scope of the problem and how serious you need to take it," Hughes said. In Wisconsin, he said, officials take drunk driving very seriously.

Hughes said a number of efforts to combat drunk driving already are underway. Those efforts address every level of the issue, from prevention and education to the judicial process and treatment level, he said. Wisconsin's alcohol-related crash fatality record has declined in recent years, Hughes said, and efforts

to improve on that record will depend largely on federal and state money to fund initiatives such as overtime law enforcement and high-visibility campaigns. Earlier this year, Wisconsin's Governor's Council on Highway Safety formed a work group made up of law enforcement, prosecutors, academics and treatment experts to draft recommendations on how to improve the OWI process.

Recommendations are expected this fall, Hughes said.

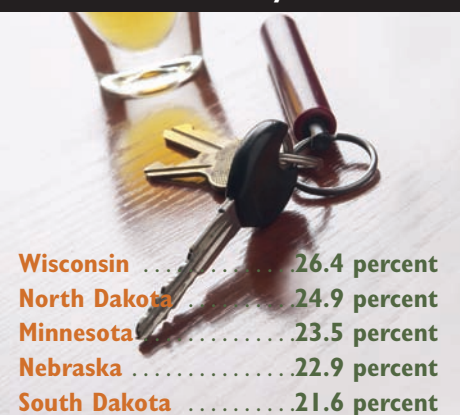
Bob Tipton, director for West Virginia's Governor's Highway Safety Program, said reports similar to SAMHSA's, but based on alcohol-related fatality records, had a similar effect on officials in his state in 2000. Although the recent SAMHSA report showed West Virginia having the second lowest percentage of respondents who admitted to driving drunk or impaired in the last year (10.1 percent), a 2000 report from NHTSA showed the state's percentage of alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities had reached 44 percent – higher than the national average of 40 percent.

Safety officials were forced to sit down and re-evaluate how they did business, and in 2002 they developed a sustained enforcement plan that has continued to

improve the state's record, Tipton said. Rather than upping enforcement only during certain times of the year, West Virginia's impaired driving enforcement activities became a yearlong effort that helped to deter potential impaired drivers, he said. Education efforts and media awareness campaigns increased, and law enforcement agencies worked together to put in place a statewide low-staffing checkpoint policy.

To read the SAMHSA report, go to <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k8/stateDUI/stateDUI.cfm>.

States with the highest percentage of respondents who admitted to having driven drunk or impaired in the last year



Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration study

BRAKING NEWS

DOT: Crash injuries down; teen competition launches

A report released May 13 by the Department of Transportation shows an annual decline in the number of people injured in highway crashes.

The number of people injured in highway crashes has declined every year since 1995, Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters said in a media release. The number of motor vehicle injuries in 2006 – 2.6 million – was a 4.8 percent decrease from 2005, Peters said. Researchers say improvements in vehicle design and technology that improve driver behavior played a role in the decline.

In an effort to improve teen driver safety, Peters announced the data at Severna Park Senior High School in Maryland during a meeting with the school's chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions. Peters said that although teen driving injuries declined 6 percent from 2005 to 2006, teens account for more than 16 percent of overall motor vehicle injuries, even though they represent only 8 percent of drivers. She also announced a new nationwide competition to create a campaign to encourage safe teen driving on rural roads.

Report says trucker oversight needs improvement

More stringent legislation and enforcement is needed for truck driver drug-testing programs, a new report from the Government Accountability Office states.

The GAO report, released May 21, highlighted a number of issues and warned that more should be done to prevent drivers from operating vehicles under the influence of drugs or alcohol. GAO researchers found:

- Many drivers are not part of a drug testing program.

- An unknown number of drug users manage to avoid detection by successfully adulterating or manipulating tests.
- Among the drivers who test positive, an unknown number continue to drive by “job hopping.”

GAO recommended Congress adopt legislation to ban subversion products and provide the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration with the ability to exert oversight and enforcement authority over service agents involved in the Department of Transportation drug testing process.

Go to www.gao.gov/new.items/d08600.pdf to download the report.

Transportation officials discuss mattress foam as fire hazard

Safety officials are seeking comment on whether polyurethane foam, a flammable material found in some mattresses, should be designated a hazardous material during transport.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration published a notice in the May 7 *Federal Register* reopening the comment period until further notice. In 2006, the National Association of State Fire Marshals requested a rulemaking giving “hazardous materials” designation to polyurethane foam and certain finished products containing polyurethane foam when transported in commerce. Washington-based NASFM said the materials pose a safety issue for emergency responders and the general public during transport because the foam, if ignited during a vehicle crash, could accelerate a fire.

According to NASFM, “serious fires involving PU foam on roads, on bridges, in garages or in tunnels pose a significant danger to the health and safety of persons; often result in the total loss of

involved vehicles; and can cause significant structural damage to roads, tunnels or surrounding buildings.”

PHMSA later received comments from 30 associations in 2007. Most opposed NASFM's request, stating transportation safety risks have not been documented.

NHTSA report urges drivers of 15-passenger vans to be safe

June through August is the deadliest time of the year for 15-passenger-van occupants, new research from NHTSA states.

The report, released May 12, stated that 31 percent of fatal rollovers involve 15-passenger vans during the summer travel months. While overall statistics show the number of deaths has been declining steadily since 2001, the vehicles still pose a safety risk to occupants, NHTSA officials warned.

In 2006, 58 people died in accidents involving 15-passenger vans. Factors that contribute to fatalities in such crashes include fully loaded vans, lack of seat belts, improperly inflated tires, poor tire condition and inexperienced drivers.

Go to www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810947.pdf to download NHTSA's report.

Traffic Safety

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STATISTICS

March traffic deaths down 17 percent

Motor vehicle deaths in March totaled 3,080 – down 17 percent from the March 2007 total.

Disabling injuries in 2008 through March are estimated to be about 502,700 – a less than 0.5 percent increase from 2007. These are injuries resulting in disability beyond the day of the collision; they do not include minor injuries, which number approximately twice as many.

The cost of motor vehicle collisions in 2008 through March is estimated to be about \$54.0 billion – a 3 percent increase from 2007. The costs include wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, employer costs, and vehicle damage.

The estimated annual mileage death rate is 1.3 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled – a 13 percent decrease from 2007.

Notes to table

Deaths are reported by state traffic authorities. All figures are preliminary. To ensure proper comparisons, 2006 and 2007 figures cover the same reporting period as those for 2008.

States shown in color had fewer deaths in 2008 than they did in 2007 for the same reporting period.

Population rate: U.S. population rate and state population rates are the estimated annual number of deaths per 100,000 population. The U.S. population and the state population rates are based on April 21, 2005, population projections, U.S. Census Bureau.

Mileage rate: The mileage rate is the number of deaths per 100 million miles of travel.

STATE MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS, CHANGES AND RATES UNITED STATES, THREE MONTHS, 2006-2008

STATE	NO. OF MONTHS	DEATHS IDENTICAL PERIODS			PERCENT CHANGES			
		2008	2007	2006	2007 TO 2008	2006 TO 2008	2008 POP. RATE	2008 MLG. RATE
TOTAL U.S.	3	9,310	10,200	10,090	-9%	-8%	13.2	1.3
Alabama	3	201	253	244	-21%	-18%	17.4	1.3
Alaska	3	9	13	16	-31%	-44%	5.3	0.7
Arizona	3	195	143	185	+36%	+5%	12.3	1.3
Arkansas	3	115	144	143	-20%	-20%	16.2	1.4
California	3	851	819	864	+4%	-2%	9.3	1.0
Colorado	3	104	110	91	-5%	+14%	8.6	0.9
Connecticut	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Delaware	3	22	41	33	-46%	-33%	10.2	0.9
District of Columbia	3	9	15	12	-40%	25%	6.1	1.0
Florida	3	744	872	857	-15%	-13%	16.3	1.5
Georgia	3	355	368	352	-4%	+1%	14.9	1.2
Hawaii	2	23	29	23	-21%	0%	10.8	1.4
Idaho	3	45	52	47	-13%	-4%	12.0	1.2
Illinois	3	227	300	305	-24%	-26%	7.1	0.8
Indiana	3	156	179	156	-13%	0%	9.8	0.9
Iowa	2	55	57	57	-4%	-4%	11.0	1.1
Kansas	2	43	59	46	-27%	-7%	9.3	0.9
Kentucky	3	180	169	163	+7%	+10%	17.0	1.5
Louisiana	2	119	88	140	+35%	-15%	16.6	1.6
Maine	3	27	36	34	-25%	-21%	8.2	0.7
Maryland	3	121	109	123	+11%	-2%	8.6	0.9
Massachusetts	2	34	74	40	-54%	-15%	3.2	0.4
Michigan	3	176	200	208	-12%	-15%	7.0	0.7
Minnesota	2	51	69	79	-26%	-35%	5.9	0.5
Mississippi	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Missouri	3	198	216	267	-8%	-26%	13.5	1.1
Montana	3	41	58	45	-29%	-9%	17.1	1.5
Nebraska	3	59	56	60	+5%	-2%	13.3	1.2
Nevada	2	44	59	61	-25%	-28%	10.3	1.3
New Hampshire	2	13	21	10	-38%	+30%	5.9	0.6
New Jersey	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
New Mexico	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
New York	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
North Carolina	3	303	354	348	-14%	-13%	13.4	1.2
North Dakota	3	18	17	18	+6%	0%	11.3	0.9
Ohio	3	248	260	252	-5%	-2%	8.7	0.9
Oklahoma	2	81	95	96	-15%	-16%	13.4	1.0
Oregon	2	56	71	69	-21%	-19%	9.0	1.0
Pennsylvania	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Rhode Island	1	6	3	2	+100%	+200%	6.8	0.9
South Carolina	3	215	224	191	-4%	+13%	19.5	1.7
South Dakota	3	21	27	33	-22%	-36%	10.6	1.0
Tennessee	3	250	234		+7%	-4%	16.2	1.4
Texas	2	352	347	364	+1%	-3%	8.8	0.9
Utah	2	31	28	35	+11%	-11%	7.0	0.7
Vermont	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Virginia	3	202	197	200	+3%	+1%	10.5	1.0
Washington	3	108	122	122	-11%	-11%	6.7	0.8
West Virginia	3	90	108	79	-17%	+14%	19.9	1.8
Wisconsin	2	86	96	97	-10%	-11%	9.2	0.9
Wyoming	3	33	34	41	-3%	-20%	25.2	1.5

X Incomplete reports
* Change less than 0.5%

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Publisher

Suzanne Powills, powills@nsc.org

Editor

Melissa J. Ruminski, ruminskm@nsc.org

Associate Editors

Deidre Bello, bellod@nsc.org
Lauretta Claussen, claussel@nsc.org
Marvin V. Greene, greenem@nsc.org
Kyle W. Morrison, [morrisk@nsc.org](mailto:morrisok@nsc.org)

Assistant Editor

Bryan O'Donnell, odonnellb@nsc.org

Graphic Design Manager

Terri Vargulich

Graphic Designer

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Sam Christensen, christes@nsc.org

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OCCUPATIONAL DRIVING TIPS

If you encounter a drunk driver

During the Fourth of July holiday weekend, the number of fatalities from motor vehicle crashes involving a drunk or impaired driver has historically been high.

The 2005 Fourth of July weekend was the deadliest holiday period of that year due to impaired driving, according to NHTSA. During that period, 48 percent of all traffic fatalities involved a driver or motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol concentration of .01 or higher. Of those fatalities, 88 percent involved a driver or motorcycle operator with a BAC level of .08 or higher – the illegal limit in all states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

All motorists should drive defensively and be prepared for a possible encounter. The National Safety Council advises motorists to be alert for drivers who display the following characteristics:

- Weaving in and out of traffic
- Making wide turns
- Straddling the center line
- Driving with no lights
- Driving too slowly
- Braking continuously, or abruptly
- Misusing turn signals

- Swerving onto the shoulder of the road
- Responding slowly to traffic signals

If you suspect the driver ahead of you is drunk or impaired, the council advises you to:

- Keep a safe distance from the vehicle – let the driver pass you.
- Do not try to overtake an impaired driver – you risk getting sideswiped or worse.
- Memorize the vehicle's license plate number.
- Notify the police immediately. Pull your vehicle over to a safe area and call 911 from a cell phone. Some cities and states prohibit use of handheld communication devices while driving except in emergency situations.
- If it appears that an oncoming car is crossing into your lane, pull over to the side of the road, sound your horn and flash your lights.

