

Traffic Safety



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Report shows motorcycle-related deaths still on the rise

New data from NHTSA shows progress has been made in reducing the number of motor vehicle-related deaths and serious injuries on highways nationwide, but more needs to be done to counter the rising death rate for motorcycle riders.

According to the final version of NHTSA's report, "Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality Counts and Estimates of People Injured for 2007," 41,059 people lost their lives in motor vehicle crashes – a decrease of 4 percent from 2006. Of those, 5,154 were motorcyclists – now defined as the motorcycle rider (operator) or passenger. That number increased 6.6 percent from the 4,837 motorcyclists killed in 2006. NHTSA data shows that motorcycles made up nearly 3 percent of all registered vehicles in the United States in 2006 – yet, per vehicle mile traveled, motorcyclists are about 35 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a traffic crash.

Department of Transportation officials say that although reports show DOT was successful in 2008 in improving motorcyclist protection – the agency updated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 218 in an effort to prevent counterfeit certification labels from appearing on non-DOT-compliant helmets – more needs to be done to address one of the nation's greatest highway safety challenges. Motorcycle and scooter sales in 2008, although down 3.3 percent from the previous year, were still high: 1.09 million, according to preliminary estimates released in February by the Motorcycle Industry Council, an Irvine, CA-based trade association.

Despite efforts from the motorcycle industry and highway safety agencies, motorcyclist fatalities have increased each year since reaching a historic low of 2,116 in 1997. In 2007, motorcyclist fatalities increased for the 10th year in a row, accounting for 13

percent of the total fatalities in motor vehicle crashes that year.

A number of factors in motorcycle crashes appear every year. These include new and older riders, alcohol-related crashes, speed, driving at night, larger engines and a lack of helmet use. NHTSA estimates helmets are 37 percent effective in preventing fatal injuries to motorcyclists. Despite this, helmet use declined to 58 percent in 2007 from 71 percent in 2000. In 2007, only 20 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico required helmet use by all motorcyclists. Other states either require only a subset of riders or motorcycle passengers – such as those younger than 18 – to use helmets, or have no helmet requirements. A report released in October 2008 showed motorcycle helmet use continued to be higher in states that require all motorcyclists to wear helmets than in states that do not.

Read more fatality and injury data from the NHTSA report at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.6a6eaf83cf719ad24ec86e10dba046a0.



BRAKING NEWS

FHWA: Freight transportation fatalities decline

Despite increases in freight transportation activity, the number of fatalities has declined or remained stable in each mode, according to a report from the Federal Highway Administration.

The February report outlines implications of freight transportation on safety, energy and the environment. Findings show that in 2007, an estimated 41,058 fatalities occurred across all modes of transportation. Of that number, 4,006 fatalities (9.8 percent) resulted from highway crashes involving large trucks, while 802 (2 percent) were large truck occupant fatalities. In 2006, an estimated 4,222 people died in crashes involving large trucks.

Additional data shows:

- Railroad incidents resulting in fatalities declined 6.2 percent to 851 fatalities in 2007.
- In 2007, about 2.49 million people were injured in highway crashes, about 8,960 were injured in railroad crashes, about 710 were injured in waterborne vessels and 62 were injured in pipeline incidents.

Download the report at www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/freight_analysis/nat_freight_stats/docs/08factsfigures/pdfs/fff2008_ch5.pdf.

Congress moves to halt cross-border trucking funding

President Barack Obama on March 11 approved a \$410 billion omnibus appropriations bill that yanks funding for the Department of Transportation's cross-border trucking demonstration project with Mexico.

Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) said the bill would halt the much-criticized project but could spur Mexico to implement sanctions against the United States. The project, which began operating on Sept.

7, 2007, as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, allows Mexican carriers access on U.S. highways past commercial border zones.

The House approved the bill on Feb. 25; the Senate passed the bill on March 10 without amendments by a voice vote.

In February, DOT's Office of Inspector General issued a report calling the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's efforts to ensure the project's safety and security "inadequate" and "limited." Despite previous calls from members of Congress to halt the program and litigation before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the program was extended on Aug. 6, 2008, for two additional years.

The report is available for download at www.oig.dot.gov/StreamFile?file=/data/pdfdocs/NAFTA_final_report_signed.pdf.

NHTSA initiates rulemaking to reduce backover incidents

On Feb. 26, NHTSA released an advance notice of proposed rulemaking for vehicle safety standards on rearview mirrors.

According to the notice, the rulemaking is intended "to improve the driver's ability to see areas to the rear of a motor vehicle to reduce backover incidents." NHTSA is obligated to amend the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 111, Rearview Mirrors, under the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act of 2007. The act became law on Feb. 28, 2008, and includes regulations aimed at reducing the incidence of child injury and death in a backover accident. Backovers often occur off public roadways when a pedestrian or cyclist is struck by a vehicle moving in reverse.

NHTSA data shows approximately 292 people – many of them children – are fatally injured in backovers each year. Approximately 18,000 people are injured

in backovers. Download the advance notice of proposed rulemaking at www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Rulemaking/Rules/Associated%20Files/Rear_Visibility_ANPRM_022509.pdf.

Study: Drivers likely to overestimate driving skills

Motorists tend to overestimate their ability to drive well while engaged in various mental tasks, according to a study conducted by researchers from the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety in Boston.

Findings from the study found that drivers devote more attention resources to activities that are more engaging. When put in a driving situation and asked to perform in-vehicle tasks (a mathematical task and quickly answering guessing-game questions), many participants in the study failed to account for the added demands on driving performance. Researchers said the study results have implications for employers, as crashes caused by distraction carry tremendous costs, including injuries and lost productive work years.

The study was published online in the National Safety Council's *Journal of Safety Research*.

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STATISTICS

December traffic deaths down 5 percent

By Kevin T. Fearn

Motor vehicle deaths in December totaled 3,310, down 5 percent from the December 2007 total. The total number of motor vehicle deaths in 2008 was 39,300 – a 9 percent decrease from 2007. The 2008 estimate is provisional and may be revised when more data is available.

Disabling injuries in 2008 are estimated to be about 2.1 million – a 9 percent decrease 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 is estimated to be about \$234.2 billion – a 9 percent decrease from 2007. The costs include wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, employer costs and vehicle damage.

The estimated annual population rate is 12.9 deaths per 100,000 population – a decrease of 10 percent from 2007. The estimated annual mileage death rate is 1.34 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, a decrease of 7 percent 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.

STATE MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS, CHANGES AND RATES UNITED STATES, 12 MONTHS, 2006-2008

STATE	NO. OF MONTHS	DEATHS IDENTICAL PERIODS			PERCENT CHANGES	
		2008	2007	2006	2007 TO 2008	2006 TO 2008
TOTAL U.S.	12	39,300	43,100	44,600	-9%	-12%
Alabama	12	913	1,054	1,155	-13%	-21%
Alaska	12	62	85	74	-27%	-16%
Arizona	12	916	1,086	1,221	-16%	-25%
Arkansas	12	590	638	642	-8%	-8%
California	12	3,491	3,843	3,754	-9%	-7%
Colorado	12	543	554	533	-2%	+2%
Connecticut	12	292	302	325	-3%	-10%
Delaware	12	122	118	145	+3%	-16%
District of Columbia	12	39	54	41	-28%	-5%
Florida	12	2,957	3,212	3,285	-8%	-10%
Georgia	12	1,446	1,594	1,663	-9%	-13%
Hawaii	12	107	134	157	-20%	-32%
Idaho	12	230	252	267	-9%	-14%
Illinois	12	1,039	1,246	1,270	-17%	-18%
Indiana	12	814	896	868	-9%	-6%
Iowa	12	405	443	439	-9%	-8%
Kansas	12	383	414	462	-7%	-17%
Kentucky	12	828	864	911	-4%	-9%
Louisiana	12	908	845	821	+7%	+11%
Maine	12	155	183	185	-15%	-16%
Maryland	12	557	593	632	-6%	-12%
Massachusetts	11	303	390	370	-22%	-18%
Michigan	12	970	1,084	1,073	-11%	-10%
Minnesota	12	435	508	487	-14%	-11%
Mississippi	X	–	–	–	–	–
Missouri	12	955	988	1,080	-3%	-12%
Montana	12	229	276	263	-17%	-13%
Nebraska	12	208	256	266	-19%	-22%
Nevada	12	322	371	432	-13%	-25%
New Hampshire	12	141	129	127	+9%	+11%
New Jersey	12	595	724	770	-18%	-23%
New Mexico	12	362	413	471	-12%	-23%
New York	X	–	–	–	–	–
North Carolina	12	1,394	1,629	1,497	-14%	-7%
North Dakota	12	104	111	111	-6%	-6%
Ohio	12	1,207	1,257	1,237	-4%	-2%
Oklahoma	12	705	736	748	-4%	-6%
Oregon	12	421	452	478	-7%	-12%
Pennsylvania	12	1,349	–	–	–	–
Rhode Island	12	66	69	81	-4%	-19%
South Carolina	12	915	1,074	1,039	-15%	-12%
South Dakota	12	118	145	191	-19%	-38%
Tennessee	12	1,009	1,171	1,270	-14%	-21%
Texas	12	3,335	3,183	3,237	+5%	+3%
Utah	12	271	285	287	-5%	-6%
Vermont	X	–	–	–	–	–
Virginia	12	818	1,023	950	-20%	-14%
Washington	12	508	565	605	-10%	-16%
West Virginia	12	380	430	412	-12%	-8%
Wisconsin	12	589	741	715	-21%	-18%
Wyoming	12	159	147	195	+8%	-18%

X Incomplete reports

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DRIVING TIPS

Avoid driver distractions

Driver distraction, or “inattention,” while driving has become a growing concern as more distractions are introduced to commercial motor vehicle drivers and the motoring public.

According to NHTSA, studies have shown that driver inattention is responsible for approximately 80 percent of traffic crashes in the United States. In addition, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s annual Large Truck Crash Causation Study, which reported data from 2007, shows 12,000 large-truck crashes occurred when CMV drivers were externally distracted (looking out the window at a passing building, street sign or person) and 3,000 occurred when the driver was internally distracted (talking on a cell phone, eating, reading or adjusting the radio).

FMCSA offers the following advice to prevent distracted-driving crashes:

Turn off your cell phone while driving. If you must use your cell phone, find a safe place to stop or pull off the road, and keep your conversation short. When using a cell phone, drivers are at a four-times greater risk of being in a crash.

Avoid fixating on objects not related to driving. Studies show inattentive drivers believe they are paying attention to the

road when, in reality, they are gazing blindly at the road or objects ahead without actually seeing or recognizing them.

Avoid smoking while driving. Smoking requires removing both hands from the steering wheel, which can increase the risk of being involved in a crash. FMCSA cites a 2007 study conducted by researchers from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety that found that smoking was a source of distraction in 0.9 percent of distracted-related crashes, which equates to approximately 12,780 crashes over the five-year period examined.

Minimize eating and drinking while driving. Eat before getting behind the wheel or leave enough time to pull over and eat in a safe area. Eating or even drinking a soda while driving can create a physical and visual distraction.

Learn more about distracted driving

In January, the National Safety Council became the first organization to call for a nationwide ban on cell phone use while driving. The council now offers a Distracted Driving Resource Kit for companies to educate employees on distracted driving risks. To learn more, go to www.distracted-driving.nsc.org.