



NEWS RELEASE

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OFFICIALS STRESS TRAFFIC SAFETY AS STATE ENTERS HEART OF SUMMER DRIVING SEASON — THE DEADLIEST PERIOD ON THE ROAD

Traffic Deaths Down To-Date in 2008

ST. PAUL — A series of fatal and serious injury crashes in the last week involving motorcyclists and bicyclists underscores the added dangers to the summer driving season — the deadliest time on Minnesota roads. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) urges motorists to slow down and pay attention to avoid serious injuries and deaths.

Since Monday, June 16, 10 motorists were killed, including three motorcyclists and one bicyclist. Crashes during this period also resulted in at least two serious, life-altering injuries to motorcyclists.

Traffic deaths usually spike during the state's warmer months due to increased vehicle miles traveled, motorists driving at faster speeds — resulting in more violent crashes — a spike in impaired driving, and additional distractions. Further factors in 2008 are influx of riders — motorcycle registrations are at an all-time high — as well as the high gas prices that have led many to invest in scooters or to bike more often.

“Motorists need to modify driving behaviors and recognize the traffic safety challenges of people on foot or on two wheels,” says Katherine Burke Moore, DPS Office of Traffic Safety deputy director.

Of 1,620 crash fatalities during 2004–2006, 171 motorcycle operators or passengers, 119 pedestrians and 25 bicyclists were killed. Of those deaths, more than half occurred June–September.

Burke Moore stresses that motor vehicle drivers need to share the road, and allow bikes and motorcycles the time and opportunity to merge or turn. Conversely, motorcyclists, bicyclists or pedestrians need to obey traffic signs and rules of the road. State law says pedestrians must obey traffic-control signals; and motorists must yield for pedestrians at all marked crosswalks or at intersections that are unmarked. And for all parties, rural and urban alike, the most critical elements are to pay attention and operate at safe speeds.

Halfway through the year, Minnesota traffic deaths are down 11 percent from 2007. To-date, 182 people have been killed on Minnesota roads compared to 204 at this time in 2007. The state has recorded 10 pedestrian deaths, 15 motorcycle rider deaths and one bicycle death in 2008.

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