



NEWS RELEASE

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ROAD DEATH MILESTONE: MINNESOTA TRAFFIC DEATHS HIT 200 FOR THE YEAR

ST. PAUL — Minnesota’s year-to-date traffic fatalities reached 200 this week following at least six traffic deaths since the 4th of July holiday travel period. The preliminary 202 death count is 13 percent below the pace of last year’s tally of 231. At this rate, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) projects 475 deaths for the year, or an average of nine traffic fatalities per week.

Traffic deaths for 2008 include two bicyclists, 12 pedestrians and 22 motorcyclists.

While noting progress in the decline in traffic deaths, state officials say high gas prices may be contributing to the drop in deaths, as fewer motorists are on the road and traveling shorter distances. Officials also stress that the potential for a spike in deaths is great during the historically deadly summer months, when motorists increase speeds — resulting in more violent crashes — and impaired driving behavior escalates.

DPS Office of Traffic Safety Director Cheri Marti says the best route to reduce traffic deaths is through motorists practicing safe driving behavior.

“Nearly all crashes are the result of driver behavior and nearly all crashes are preventable,” says Marti. “Ultimately, a decline in traffic deaths comes down to motorists practicing smart, safe behaviors behind the wheel, such as buckling up, paying attention and driving at safe speeds.”

Marti says heightened enforcement efforts such as the May “Click It or Ticket” campaign and the current July-long DWI campaign are necessary efforts to prevent deaths and injuries.

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Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Driver and Vehicle Services

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Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Minnesota State Patrol

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Office of Justice Programs

Office of Traffic Safety

State Fire Marshal

Marti adds the state's *Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)* initiative is another factor in preventing traffic deaths. *TZD* is an interagency partnership led by the departments of Public Safety and Transportation, in cooperation with state and local law enforcement, the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Health, Minnesota County Engineers Association, and the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota. *TZD* encourages traffic safety community stakeholders such as law enforcement, engineers, emergency medical technicians and educators/communication professionals to partner with the state to tailor solutions specific to their local traffic safety needs. *TZD* focuses on the application of four strategic areas to reduce crashes — education, enforcement, engineering and emergency medical strategies.

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