



## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **MINNESOTA TRAFFIC DEATHS HIT 300 FOR THE YEAR**

*Motorcycle Deaths Near 50 To-Date; Pedestrian Deaths for Year Hit 25*

ST. PAUL — Minnesota's year-to-date traffic fatalities topped 300 over the weekend, putting the state on pace to have fewer traffic deaths than 2008, which had the lowest death count since 1945. As of September 21, the state has recorded 302 traffic deaths, compared to 307 at this time last year. At this rate, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) projects 450 deaths for the year, or an average of 8.7 traffic fatalities per week. In 2008, 455 people were killed on Minnesota roads.

DPS officials say enforcement of seat belt use as well as aggressive and impaired driving patrols have factored in the lower death count. DPS also cites MnDOT engineering improvements and efficient emergency response to crashes are contributing to the lower death count — all elements of the state's *Toward Zero Deaths* traffic safety initiative.

"Hitting the 300 deaths milestone for the year is a significant signal for motorists that traffic crashes remain far too common and the task of driving needs to be taken seriously," says Cheri Marti, director of DPS Office of Traffic Safety. "While there is a trend of fewer road deaths, the real key to limiting traffic deaths is for motorists to exercise safe driver behavior."

Traffic deaths for 2009 include 47 motorcyclists, slightly fewer than the tally at this time in 2008, but still representing 16 percent of the 2009 preliminary total. In 2008, the total 72 motorcyclist deaths was a 25-year high. September is historically one of the deadliest months for riders.

Included in the 2009 death count are 25 pedestrians — up from 16 at this time last year, and six bicyclists, on pace with last year's death tally. Last year was the deadliest year for bicyclists since 2000 — 13 bike riders were killed in 2008.

Marti says the pedestrian deaths is another reminder for motorists to be alert for those on feet — especially with college and schools back in session.

"Anticipate pedestrians crossing both at crosswalks and crossing illegally," says Marti. "Your role as a driver is to be attentive and drive at safe speeds so you can react."

Marti stresses that pedestrians must "cross where it's safe, not where it's convenient." In Minnesota, motorists must yield for crossing pedestrians at all marked and unmarked crosswalks and intersections; pedestrians must obey traffic control devices.

The state recorded 100 road deaths in early May and hit 200 deaths in mid-July.

The state's cornerstone traffic safety initiative is *Toward Zero Deaths*. *TZD* is a partnership led by the departments of Public Safety, Transportation and Health, in cooperation with state and local law enforcement, the Federal Highway Administration, 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 trauma response.

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