



NEWS RELEASE

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RECORD-LOW NUMBER OF ALCOHOL-RELATED DEATHS IN 2009 HIGHLIGHTS ANNUAL IMPAIRED DRIVING FACTS REPORT

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ST. PAUL — Minnesota alcohol-related crashes in 2009 resulted in a record low 141 deaths — a 13 percent drop from the 163 deaths in 2008. Despite the drop in deaths, the death figure represented 34 percent of the 421 traffic deaths, matching historical trends. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety today released *Minnesota Motor Vehicle Impaired Driving Facts*, its annual summary of impaired driving. Final 2010 alcohol-related crash statistics and DWI arrest numbers will be available in the spring of 2011.

Nationally, alcohol-related deaths decreased by 10 percent (from 13,846 in 2008 to 12,509 in 2009). During 2005–2009, Minnesota averaged 171 alcohol-related traffic deaths and 37,168 DWIs annually. Each year, around 75 percent of the drinking drivers killed are also not buckled up. (Comprehensive 2009 impaired driving facts on page 2).

“While Minnesota has made progress to reduce alcohol-related deaths through enhanced enforcement and education efforts, it is very discouraging that we continue to battle a behavior that everyone knows is dangerous, deadly and comes with serious consequences,” says Cheri Marti, Department of Public Safety (DPS) director of the Office of Traffic Safety.

Why the Drop in Alcohol-Related Deaths

DPS cites legislation — such as 0.08 and primary seat belt law — as well as proactive efforts as factors in the trend of fewer alcohol-related deaths. Marti says high-visibility statewide and county-specific enforcement programs coupled with educational outreach campaigns has been successful. She says advertising campaigns and community outreach help make Minnesotans aware of increased enforcement to encourage use of safe alternatives to avoid driving impaired.

DPS also reports DWI courts have demonstrated results in several counties to change the drinking and driving behavior of chronic DWI offenders. DWI courts provide judicial leadership, multidisciplinary collaboration of those within the criminal justice system, and local planning when working with repeat DWI offenders. They have demonstrated success on breaking the cycle of re-offense by addressing substance abuse issues.

Continued efforts to prevent impaired driving include a statewide interlock pilot program with more than 1,000 participants (www.MinnesotaIgnitionInterlock.org). Marti says interlocks will become a greater tool in the fight against impaired driving in July 2011 when the state’s ignition interlock law becomes effective. The law gives DWI offenders a chance to regain driving privileges by ensuring safe and legal driving through the use of interlocks — vehicle-installed devices that require a driver to provide a breath sample in order for the vehicle to start.

“There are many elements Minnesota has in place to prevent impaired driving, ranging from legislation, enforcement, treatment programs and safe transportation alternatives,” says Marti. “In the end, stopping impaired driving boils down to Minnesotans making smart decisions and the awareness that even though you haven’t been caught, even though you haven’t crashed, it only takes one time to destroy your life or someone’s family.”

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Highlights of the 2009 Motor Vehicle Impaired Driving Facts:

Alcohol-Related Crashes and Resulting Deaths

- 3,931 alcohol-related crashes resulting in 141 deaths and 2,592 injuries. There were 163 alcohol-related deaths in 2008 and 197 in 2007.
- 101 (72 percent) of the 141 alcohol-related deaths occurred outside the Twin Cities' metro — Greater Minnesota accounted for 297 total traffic deaths — 34 percent were alcohol-related.

DWI Arrests

- 32,756 motorists were arrested for DWI, translating to 90 DWI arrests a day. There were 35,736 arrests in 2008 and 38,635 arrests in 2007. The Twin Cities' metro area and the 80-county greater Minnesota each accounted for about one-half of all 2009 DWI arrests.
- In all, one in seven current Minnesota drivers (541,197) has a DWI on record, and one in 17 has two or more DWIs. DPS reports that 41 percent of those who incur one violation will incur a second DWI within 15 years of their first arrest.
- Males accounted for 75 percent of all DWIs in 2009 — down from 79 percent in 2001 and reflecting a steady climb of female DWI offenders.
- Motorists ages 20–29 represented 43 percent of DWI arrests. One in 13 of the DWI arrests were motorists under age 21.
- 59 percent of violators were first-time offenders, yet 13,462 (41 percent) had at least one prior DWI at the time of arrest. The average alcohol concentration among first-time offenders was 0.15. For repeat offenders the average was 0.16.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of the DWI arrests were made on Saturdays and Sundays.

Impaired Drivers and Belt Use

- 76 percent of drinking drivers killed were not wearing seat belts.

DWI Conviction Rates

- 74 percent of motorists arrested for DWI resulted in a criminal conviction for driving while impaired by alcohol. However, this percentage will increase in time as court cases are settled. Historically, about 85 percent of DWI arrests result in a conviction each year.
- The top counties for DWI conviction rates were: Traverse (100 percent), Red Lake (98 percent), Kittson (94 percent), Pope (94 percent), Murray (92 percent), Marshall (91 percent), Wilkin (90 percent), and Hubbard (90 percent).
- The counties with the lowest conviction rates were Anoka (64 percent), Washington (65 percent), Chisago (66 percent), Ramsey (66 percent), Steele (67 percent), Dakota (68 percent), Jackson (68 percent), and Hennepin (69 percent).

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