



NEWS RELEASE

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2009 TRAFFIC CRASH REPORT: MINNESOTA DEATHS LOWEST SINCE 1944

*Alcohol-Related Deaths Lowest Ever, Motorcyclist Fatalities Plummet,
Teen Deaths Up Slightly, Pedestrian Deaths Jump*

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ST. PAUL — There were 421 traffic deaths on Minnesota roads in 2009, the lowest on record since 1944 and an 8 percent drop from 455 deaths in 2008. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) annual detailed summary of traffic crashes, *Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2009*, is online at www.dps.state.mn.us/ots under “Crash Data and Reports.”

The decrease in deaths continues a trend of fewer fatalities in recent years and marks significant progress from the last decade when 550–650 people were killed annually. In 2000 there were 625 deaths; 2001 — 568; 2002 — 657; 2003 — 655; 2004 — 567; 2005 — 559; 2006 — 494; 2007 — 510; 2008 — 455; and 2009 — 421.

“The state’s road safety progress is made clear by the facts. Our efforts are helping to prevent deaths on Minnesota roadways,” says DPS Commissioner Michael Campion. “This trend shows how effective legislation and well-executed traffic safety programs can be.”

Why the Drop in Deaths

Factoring in the continued decline in traffic deaths and improved road safety have been legislation pieces passed in recent years: 0.08 legal alcohol-concentration limit (2005); ban on cell phone use for new teen drivers (2006); stronger teen graduated driver’s licensing laws (2008); ban on texting, emailing and web access (2008); and the primary seat belt law and booster seat law requirement for children (2009). On July 1, 2011, the ignition interlock law becomes effective, requiring certain drivers with impaired driving records to provide a breath sample in order for the vehicle to start.

Cheri Marti, DPS director of the Office of Traffic Safety, adds that proactive efforts through the state’s *Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)* platform have played a role in the drop in deaths. She cites enhanced enforcement campaigns targeting belt use, speeding and impaired driving. Marti says paid media and outreach efforts conducted by partners are helping to educate communities; while engineering enhancements such as cable median barriers are preventing fatal crashes. She also says that improved emergency response is working to increase the chances of survival for crash victims, especially in rural communities. The *TZD* goal is fewer than 400 deaths by 2010. To-date, the state has recorded 153 deaths. There were 162 deaths at this time in 2009.

DPS officials also acknowledge that unemployment and gas prices contributed to less traffic and motorists traveling at safer speeds, and consequently a lower death-count. However, there was not a significant drop in vehicle miles traveled. The Minnesota Department of Transportation reports 56.9 billion vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on Minnesota roads last year — just 1 percent lower than the 57.3 billion in 2008. The Minnesota 2009 fatality rate per 100 million VMT is less than one person (0.74), the lowest ever recorded. The U.S. fatality rate is 1.16.

Marti says that driver behavior is the main factor in limiting traffic deaths and serious injuries. “Ultimately, we can prevent traffic deaths when everyone buckles up, hangs up the phone, obeys speed limits and realizes there are many alternatives to driving impaired.”

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Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2009 Highlights

Crash Facts 2009 details crashes by vehicle type, contributing factors, driver age and gender, and occurrence of crashes by county, as well as cities with populations of 2,500 or more.

Crash Facts 2009 reports 73,498 crashes and 31,074 injuries — 1,271 severe. The 421 fatalities reflect motorists (302 — 5 commercial truck occupants); motorcyclists (53); pedestrians (41); bicyclists (10); ATV riders (9); farm equipment occupants (3); commercial bus occupants (2); and other (1).

Geographically, 124 deaths (30 percent) occurred in the Twin Cities' seven-county metro while 297 deaths (70 percent) occurred in the 80 counties of greater Minnesota.

The most common factors in all 2009 crashes are in order of frequency: driver inattention/distraction, failure to yield right-of-way, and illegal or unsafe speed.

Seat Belts

Of the 302 vehicle occupants killed, just 129 were belted; 50 percent of those not belted were ejected. The primary belt law helped increase daytime belt compliance to a record-high 90 percent and resulted in fewer unbelted traffic deaths, which the law intended. It is critical for motorists to insist every passenger is belted to ensure a safe trip and avoid being stopped and ticketed.

Impaired Driving

The 141 alcohol-related deaths in 2009 is an all-time low. However, impaired driving is still a factor in more than one-third of all deaths, matching historical trends. Drivers must plan for a safe and sober ride and to avoid drinking and driving. Last year, 32,576 motorists were arrested for DWI, a nearly 9 percent decrease from 2008. One in seven Minnesota drivers has a DWI.

Motorcycles

In 2009, there were 53 rider deaths, a drop of 26 percent from the 72 deaths in 2008, which was the highest death count in 24 years. A likely factor for the drop is that the recent surge of boomer-age riders has become more seasoned and experienced, and less likely to crash. Male riders ages 40–49 accounted for 28 percent of fatalities. Other factors for the drop include the economy (fewer purchasing bikes), rider training, outreach efforts and enforcement, and a cooler and wetter riding season. Ridership is at an all-time high which underscores the need for rider training, use of protective gear, and for motorists to be aware of riders.

Teens

There were 35 teenage deaths (16–19) in 2009, a slight increase from 31 deaths in 2008. The increase reverses a trend of fewer teen deaths in recent years (deaths had dropped since 2007 when 65 were killed). Parents are encouraged to set limits for teens, and continue to monitor and train teen drivers after licensure.

Pedestrians

There was a jump in pedestrian deaths from 25 in 2008 to 41 in 2009, the highest total since 2005 (44). Of the pedestrians killed, 33 had alcohol-concentration levels of 0.08 or higher. Pedestrians need to cross where it's safe — not where it's convenient — and motorists must be alert for pedestrians and anticipate those crossing illegally.

Bicyclists

The 10 cyclist deaths in 2009 was a decrease from 13 fatalities in 2008. Cyclists should plan a safe route, wear a helmet, reflective gear, and obey traffic signals and signs.

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Editor's Note: Download traffic crash data by county for the years 2005–2009 and video/audio clips to use for broadcast at <https://mndeptpublicsafety.sharefile.com/d-s39d6dc627b94afab>