



NEWS RELEASE

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MORE COUNTIES REPORTING FEWER TRAFFIC FATALITIES

Drive Toward Zero Deaths Makes Headway Across State

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) reports that the 559 traffic fatalities in 2005 was a 9 percent decrease compared to 2000–2004 annual average of 614 deaths. Of Minnesota's 87 counties, 52 had fewer crash deaths last year than their previous five-year average, whereas 33 reported more.

The overall reduction in deaths is significant in three categories of contributing factors: seat belt use, impaired driving and speeding. In 2005, compared to the previous five-year average, there was a 15 percent decrease in unbelted fatalities, a 12 percent decrease in alcohol-related traffic deaths, and a nearly 7 percent decrease in fatal crashes due to illegal or unsafe speed.

Nine counties, mostly in western Minnesota, recorded no traffic fatalities in 2005: Big Stone, Chippewa, Grant, Mahnommen, Norman, Sibley, Swift and Traverse. Scattered throughout the state were 10 counties that had only one traffic fatality each: Brown, Cook, Cottonwood, Koochiching, Lac Qui Parle, Marshall, Mower, Nicollet, Red Lake and Rock.

Counties that are home to the state's largest metro areas saw a decrease in traffic deaths. Notably, four Twin Cities' metro counties saw a decrease of three or more fatalities in 2005 compared to the previous five-year period, as did St. Louis and Olmsted counties, home to Duluth and Rochester, respectively. The southeast region of Minnesota also saw a cluster of counties with fewer traffic deaths.

Public Safety officials ascribe some of the reduction in traffic deaths to combined programming efforts by state, county and local agencies in the Toward Zero Deaths (TZD), an inter-agency program designed to reduce traffic fatalities through a combination of enforcement, engineering, emergency trauma care and education.

Specifically, enforcement programs such as NightCAP and HEAT which focus on impaired driving and excessive speeding, respectively, are credited. Additionally, public education — and motorists' behavior — is credited with increasing seat belt use to a record 84 percent.

— MORE —

Alcohol
and Gambling
Enforcement

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Program

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Minnesota
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Despite the smaller population and density of the counties with one or no traffic deaths, as well as geographic distance from key metro areas, DPS officials see them as an example for the rest of Minnesota counties.

“If every county with traffic deaths would work to reduce their fatalities by at least one, it would be a great progress,” says Kathy Swanson, director of the Office of Traffic Safety.

“That reduction achieved at the county level would truly drive Minnesota toward zero deaths.”

TZD is a multi-agency partnership led by the Minnesota departments of Public Safety, Health and Transportation, with partners including the State Patrol, Federal Highway Administration, county engineers, and the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota.

Editor’s Note: *The following supporting material is available by contacting*

dennis.smith@state.mn.us :

- *Graphic showing county traffic deaths in color or black & white in PDF format*
- *2000–04 v. 2005 Traffic Deaths by County and Contributing Factors*

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