



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 20, 2007

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CRASH FACTS 2006 REPORTS DROP IN DEATHS, ALCOHOL-RELATED FATALITIES

Traffic Deaths Lowest in 60 Years; Goal of 400 or Fewer Set for 2010

ST. PAUL — The annual summary of traffic crashes, *Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2006*, reports that 494 motorists were killed last year, the fewest number of deaths since 1945 — a nearly 12 percent decrease from 559 traffic deaths in 2005. A record-low number of 166 alcohol-related deaths accounted for one-third of the total, while 70 motorcyclists were killed, reflecting a continuing upward trend in rider fatalities. The report is posted online at www.dps.state.mn/ots.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) compiles the annual report which details crashes by vehicle type, contributing factors, driver age and gender, and occurrence of crashes by county, as well as cities with population of 2,500 or more.

Crash Facts 2006 reports nearly 79,000 crashes, 494 deaths, and more than 35,000 injuries at an estimated economic impact of more than \$1.5 billion. The numbers reflect the deaths of motorists (373), motorcyclists (70), pedestrians (38), bicyclists (8), ATV riders (2) and snowmobilers (3).

Of the 373 vehicle occupants killed, 194 (52 percent) were not wearing seat belts. Of impaired drivers killed, nearly 70 percent were unbuckled. Nearly 40 percent of the deaths (196) were people under age 30. One in five fatal crashes occurred between 3 and 7 p.m. Geographically, 141 deaths (29 percent) occurred in the Twin Cities' seven-county metro which has 54 percent of the state's population, while 353 deaths (71 percent) occurred in the 80 counties of greater Minnesota.

Crash Facts reports almost 57 billion vehicle miles traveled on state roads last year. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has decreased to less than one person (0.87) — among the lowest in the nation — and down from a rate of 5.52 in 1966. There are 3.8 million licensed drivers and 4.7 million registered vehicles in Minnesota, according to *Crash Facts*.

While alcohol-related traffic deaths reached an all-time low of 166, down from 177 in 2005, they represented one-third of all road deaths. A record 42,000 impaired drivers were arrested in 2006. The estimated economic cost of impaired crashes, deaths and injuries is nearly \$278 million.

— more —

Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement
ARMER/911 Program
Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
Driver and Vehicle Services
Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Minnesota State Patrol
Office of Communications
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Traffic Safety
State Fire Marshal and Pipeline Safety

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Notably, traffic deaths in Minnesota of motorcycle operators/passengers continued a 10-year rise, mirroring a national trend. In 2006, motorcycles represented just 4 percent of registered vehicles in Minnesota but accounted for 70 deaths — or nearly 14 percent of the total traffic deaths.

The state's *Toward Zero Deaths* (TZD) program, designed to reduce traffic fatalities and lead by DPS and the Minnesota Department of Transportation, attributes the fewer deaths to local partnerships and advances in the “4 E’s” — enforcement, engineering, education and emergency trauma care. Public safety officials acknowledged reaching 500 deaths or fewer two years ahead of the 2008 goal, but tempered the success.

“While progress has been significant in recent years, the loss of nearly 500 people in mostly preventable crashes is unacceptable, not only to families and friends, but to our mission for enhancing public safety,” says DPS Commissioner Michael Campion. “Our new TZD goal is 400 or fewer deaths by 2010. We ask and need all Minnesota motorists to help us reach that by committing to safe driving behavior everyday.”

To-date in 2006, the state has tallied 201 road deaths. The driver behaviors officers cite most often as contributing factors in fatal crashes are illegal or unsafe speed, followed by inattention. The most common factors in all crashes are, in order of frequency, driver inattention or distraction, failure to yield right-of-way, and illegal or unsafe speed. In addition to law enforcement periods focusing on impaired driving and seat belt use, HEAT (highway enforcement of aggressive traffic) has resumed statewide targeting of speeders. Last year, nearly 34,000 drivers were cited for illegal speed by HEAT patrols.

Driving Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths