



NEWS RELEASE

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REVIEW SHOWS MAJORITY OF COUNTIES' TRAFFIC DEATHS DROP

Select Counties, Metro Areas Lead Drive Toward Zero Deaths

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) reports that the 494 traffic fatalities in 2006 was an 18 percent decrease compared to the 2001–2005 annual average of 601 deaths. Of Minnesota's 87 counties, 52 had fewer crash deaths last year than their previous five-year average, whereas 32 reported more.

The overall reduction in deaths is significant in three categories of contributing factors: seat belt use, impaired driving and speeding. In 2006, compared to the previous five-year average, there was a 24 percent decrease in unbelted fatalities, a 23 percent decrease in alcohol-related traffic deaths, and a nearly 11 percent decrease in fatal crashes due to illegal or unsafe speed.

Five counties saw an increase of three or more traffic deaths in 2006 than the previous five years: Beltrami (3.4), Chisago (6.4), Fillmore (3.6), McLeod (3) and Mille Lacs (3.4).

Notably, six of the seven Twin Cities' metro counties saw a decrease, and four had three or more fatalities fewer in 2006. Hennepin County — historically the leader in road deaths — lead the positive trend with 40 traffic deaths, or 18 fewer compared to its historical annual average of 57.6. Ramsey and Scott counties saw significant drops with eight fewer deaths each compared to their 2001–2005 average of 28.4 and 16.4, respectively. Dakota County had 5.4 fewer deaths, while Carver and Washington counties both saw two fewer traffic fatalities in 2006 compared to the five-year annual average. Anoka was the only Twin Cities' county that saw an increase with 2.6 more deaths than its 26.4 average.

Eight counties, mostly in western Minnesota, recorded no traffic fatalities in 2006: Houston, Kanabec, Kittson, Lincoln, Norman, Pennington, Roseau and Swift. Ten counties had only one traffic fatality each: Big Stone, Cottonwood, Grant, Jackson, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Murray, Rock, Traverse and Wilkin. Scattered throughout Minnesota were 13 counties that reported two traffic fatalities each last year: Aitkin, Cook, Dodge, Freeborn, Lac Qui Parle, Mahnommen, Marshall, Martin, Nobles, Pipestone, Red Lake, Sibley and Stevens.

— more —

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Progress in Counties' Traffic Fatalities

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St. Louis County, which includes the city of Duluth, reported 21 deaths or 4.6 fewer than its 25.6 yearly average, while Olmsted County with the city of Rochester reported 15 crash deaths, slightly above its 13.4 average.

The tri-county area of Benton, Sherburne and Stearns, which includes the city of St. Cloud and its suburbs, collectively had 28 deaths, a dramatic nearly one-third reduction from the 41.2 annual average death toll.

Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) officials ascribe 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 (nighttime alcohol concentrated patrol) and HEAT (highway enforcement of aggressive traffic) which focus on impaired driving and excessive speeding, respectively, are credited. Additionally, public education — and motorists' behavior — is credited with the state's seat belt use maintaining a relatively high compliance rate of 84 percent.

“Many counties are seeing strong individual progress as a result of local law enforcement and engineers, as well as safety advocacy groups and grass-roots programming,” says Cheri Marti, director of the DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “If every county could reduce their fatalities by at least one, it would be a great progress and that reduction at the county level would truly drive Minnesota toward zero deaths.”

After reaching fewer than 500 traffic deaths in 2006, a new TZD goal of 400 or fewer fatalities by 2010 was established. TZD is a multi-agency partnership led by the Minnesota departments of Public Safety and Transportation, with partners including the State Patrol, Federal Highway Administration, the state Department of Health, county and city engineers, the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota, and local traffic safety advocacy groups.

Editor's Note: *The following supporting material is available by contacting dennis.smith@state.mn.us :*

- *Graphic showing regions with county-specific traffic deaths in PDF format*
- *Table of 2001–2005 v. 2006 Traffic Deaths by County and Contributing Factors*

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