



NEWS RELEASE

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MINNESOTA TRAFFIC DEATHS SLIGHTLY UP IN 2007

ST. PAUL — The state’s annual summary of traffic crashes, *Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2007*, reports 510 people were killed on state roads in 2007, up from 494 in 2006. Contributing to the 3.5 percent death increase was the 35W bridge collapse — 12 of the 13 bridge fatalities were classified as traffic deaths. *Crash Facts* is online at www.dps.state.mn.us/ots, click on “Crash Data and Reports.”

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) compiles the report which 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 2007 reports more than 81,000 crashes, 510 deaths, and nearly 36,000 injuries. The estimated economic impact of these incidents is more than \$1.65 billion — which includes such cost factors as wage and productivity losses, medical and emergency expenses, and employer’s uninsured costs.

The fatalities reflect the deaths of motorists (399), motorcyclists (61), pedestrians (33), bicyclists (4), ATV riders (4), snowmobilers (3), occupants driving/riding farm equipment (3), and other (3).

Crash Facts reports more than 57 billion vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on state roads last year. The fatality rate per 100 million VMT is less than one person (0.89) — among the lowest in the nation — and down from a rate of 5.52 in 1966. There are 3.9 million licensed drivers and 4.8 million registered vehicles in Minnesota.

Of the 399 vehicle occupants killed, 195 (49 percent) were not wearing seat belts. During nighttime hours, (9 p.m. – 3 a.m.), only 28 of the 91 motorists killed were belted. Of impaired drivers killed, nearly 75 percent were unbuckled. There were 190 alcohol-related traffic deaths in 2007, up from the all-time low of 166 in 2006. More than 38,600 motorists were arrested for DWI last year. The estimated economic cost of impaired crashes, deaths and injuries is more than \$314 million.

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People under age 30 accounted for 34 percent of the deaths (172). Teens (ages 16–19) were represented in 41 deaths, a 37 percent drop from 65 deaths in 2006. Teen deaths have dropped significantly since 2003 when 88 teens were killed. Officials say the new teen driver nighttime and passenger limitation laws will help to continue this trend.

One in four fatal crashes occurred between 3 and 7 p.m. The deadliest hours for fatal crashes were 2–3 p.m. (32 deaths) and 5–6 p.m. (35 deaths). Geographically, 168 deaths (33 percent) occurred in the Twin Cities' seven-county metro which has 54 percent of the state's population, while 342 deaths (67 percent) occurred in the 80 counties of greater Minnesota.

Traffic deaths in Minnesota of motorcycle operators/passengers dropped from 70 deaths in 2006 to 61 in 2007, yet motorcyclist deaths still accounted for 12 percent of all road deaths. Motorcycles represent just 4 percent of all registered vehicles.

In the last five years, the state's traffic deaths have trended lower: 2003 — 655 deaths; 2004 — 567; 2005 — 559; 2006 — 494; 2007 — 510. Public safety officials attribute the trend to enhanced, better targeted enforcement efforts and increased seat belt use rates. Officials also say the *Toward Zero Deaths* (TZD) program has been effective. 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. TZD acknowledges that each community is unique and encourages local coalitions to partner with state agencies to tailor solutions specific to their traffic issues and resources by employing the "4 E's" of traffic safety — enforcement, engineering, education and emergency trauma care. The TZD goal is 400 or fewer traffic deaths by 2010.

"Preventing deaths and serious injuries on state roads ultimately comes down to driver behavior," says DPS Commissioner Michael Campion, who stresses seat belt use, driving at safe speeds, paying attention and never driving impaired. "And while we can't ignore the progress we've made, we can't ignore solutions that will help save more lives, such as a primary seat belt law."

To-date in 2008, the state has tallied 269 road deaths, compared to 306 at this time in 2007 — a 12 percent drop in 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.