



# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **STATE TRAFFIC DEATHS HIT 300 FOR THE YEAR**

### *Motorcycle Deaths Continue to Surge*

ST. PAUL — Minnesota’s year-to-date traffic fatalities topped 300 this week, 14 percent below the 350 death count from the same time last year. As of September 16, the state has recorded 301 traffic deaths. At this rate, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) projects 450 deaths for the year, or an average of nine traffic fatalities per week. In 2007, 510 people were killed in traffic crashes in Minnesota.

DPS officials say increased seat belt use, targeted impaired and aggressive driving patrols, road safety improvements, as well as emergency medical services efforts are contributing to the lower death count. Traffic safety officials nationwide believe higher gas prices are also contributing to the drop in deaths observed across the county, but it is unknown to what extent. Officials say the spike in gas prices has led motorists to travel less and at safer speeds.

“Maintaining this progress is up to motorists exercising safe driver behavior,” says Cheri Marti, director of DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “The most critical component to limit traffic deaths and serious injuries is to buckle up, in addition, motorists must pay attention, travel at safe speeds, and drive sober.”

Traffic deaths for 2008 include 52 motorcyclists. Despite the overall decrease in traffic deaths, rider fatalities are continuing to surge, currently representing 17 percent of the 2008 preliminary total. In 2007, the total 61 motorcyclist deaths accounted for 12 percent of all traffic deaths. Included in the 2008 death count are 19 pedestrians and five bicyclists.

The state recorded 100 road deaths in late April and hit 200 deaths in early July.

The state’s cornerstone traffic safety initiative is *Toward Zero Deaths*. *TZD* is an interagency partnership led by the departments of Public Safety and Transportation, in cooperation with state and local law enforcement, the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Health, Minnesota County Engineers Association, and the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota. *TZD* encourages traffic safety community stakeholders such as law enforcement, engineers, emergency medical technicians and educators/communication professionals to partner with the state to tailor solutions specific to their local traffic safety needs. *TZD* focuses on the application of four strategic areas to reduce crashes — education, enforcement, engineering and emergency medical strategies.

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- Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
- Driver and Vehicle Services
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- Minnesota State Patrol
- Office of Communications
- Office of Justice Programs
- Office of Traffic Safety
- State Fire Marshal