



## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **DPS PROJECTS 2010 MINNESOTA TRAFFIC DEATHS TO MATCH 2009 — LOWEST SINCE 1944**

*Big Drop in Motorcyclist Deaths Highlights Early Findings*

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ST. PAUL — At least 410 people were killed on Minnesota roads in 2010, according to preliminary records from the state Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety. DPS projects the final 2010 count to close around the 420 mark — on par with 2009's total of 421, the lowest number of annual deaths since 1944.

Officials say the 2010 figure will increase during the next few months as additional fatal crash reports are submitted to DPS. Final crash numbers will be announced early this summer.

"We've seen a positive trend-line of fewer road deaths in recent years that points to the success of legislation and proactive traffic safety campaigns," says DPS Commissioner Michael Campion. "While it appears 2010 won't show a big reduction in deaths, we are maintaining a low death count and have cut down our annual road deaths by more than 200 since just eight years ago — that is very significant."

Campion cites these factors for the lower death trend: traffic safety legislation (such as primary seat belt law); enhanced enforcement coupled with education efforts; effective MnDOT, county and local engineering improvements; efficient emergency trauma response; as well as safer vehicles.

"These are all critical elements to the progress, but none are as important as safe driver behavior. The key to reducing deaths is for motorists to take the task of driving seriously," says Campion.

A critical statistic to determine road safety is the death rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT). DPS estimates the 2010 VMT will be 0.73, which would be the lowest ever for Minnesota. In 2009, the state VMT fatality rate was less than one person (0.74) — the second lowest in the nation — and down from a rate of 5.52 in 1966.

Highlights from preliminary 2010 traffic data:

- Motorcyclist deaths plummet again — 41 rider deaths compared to 53 total deaths in 2009. This marks the second consecutive major decline in rider deaths (2009 deaths dropped 28 percent from 2008). In recent years, motorcyclist deaths had boomed as ridership hit record levels. DPS attributes the decline to the influx of boomer-age riders becoming more seasoned and experienced, and less likely to crash. Other factors include rider training programs, enforcement and public outreach.
- The preliminary 410 fatality count includes motorists (313), motorcyclists (41); pedestrians (39 — slightly down from the 41 in 2009); bicyclists (nine — even with 2009); ATV riders (four); farm equipment operators (two); one snowmobiler; and one battery powered conveyance vehicle operator.
- Teen deaths — a surge of teen deaths in spring contributed to 37 teen deaths (ages 16–19), up from the 35 killed in 2009.

—MORE—

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- DWI arrests — 26,810 preliminary DWI arrests; there were 32,924 DWI arrests in 2009. The preliminary DWI arrest count will grow as alcohol-concentration data is finalized. Crash data regarding alcohol-related deaths will be reported later this year. Each year, alcohol-related crashes account for more than one-third of the state's total death count. Last year there were 141 alcohol-related deaths, the lowest death count on record since being tracked in 1984.

DPS officials also cite milestones in 2010 that will drive the trend of fewer road deaths in 2011:

- Daytime seat belt compliance hit a record-high 92 percent — Campion says the primary seat belt law helped to again boost the state's belt use rate. The belt law (in effect since June 2009) requires drivers and all passengers to be belted or in the correct child restraint, and allows law enforcement to stop drivers or passengers for belt violations.
- Strengthened DWI sanctions law, including greater use of ignition interlocks, effective July 1, 2011. This law requires first-time DWI offenders arrested at 0.16 alcohol-concentration level or higher and all repeat offenders to drive only a vehicle with an ignition interlock installed, or face longer periods without driving privileges. Interlocks are attached to a vehicle starter and require the driver to provide a breath sample to determine their alcohol-concentration level prior in starting the vehicle.

Since 2000, the state's annual traffic deaths steadily declined: in 2000 there were 625 deaths; 2001 — 568; 2002 — 657; 2003 — 655; 2004 — 567; 2005 — 559; 2006 — 494; 2007 — 510; 2008 — 455; 2009 — 421.

The state's traffic safety efforts are driven by its core traffic safety initiative, [\*Toward Zero Deaths \(TZD\)\*](#). A primary vision of the *TZD* program is to sculpt a safe driving culture in Minnesota in which motorists support a goal of zero road fatalities by practicing and promoting safe and smart driving behavior. *TZD* focuses on the application of four strategic areas to reduce crashes — education, enforcement, engineering and emergency trauma response.

***Driving Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths.***

**Editor's Note:** Download county-specific 2010 preliminary facts (crashes, deaths, serious injuries and DWI arrests) here: <https://mndeptpublicsafety.sharefile.com/d/sd5c8053d5264fd7a>