

MILES PER HOUR

Newsletter of the Office of Traffic Safety



Winter 2012

Annual Traffic Deaths Fall Under 400 for First Time Since 1944

Traffic crashes in Minnesota claimed the lives of 367 people in 2011, according to preliminary reports from the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). The figure represents a 35 percent reduction in deaths since 2001, and a fourth consecutive annual decline in fatalities.

DPS projects the final total — available in early summer as additional crash reports are submitted — will be around 11 percent below the 2010 figure (411) and the lowest since 1944 (356).

“The continuing reduction of preventable traffic deaths is a true Minnesota success story that every motorist has supported and played a critical role in achieving,” says Donna Berger, OTS director. “This progress demonstrates that the epidemic of hundreds of tragedies does not have to be our annual reality.”

DPS officials note positive driver behavior is propelling the progress. Seat belt compliance is at a record high 93 percent while alcohol-related fatal and injury crashes, and DWI arrests continue to drop.

Other factors include traffic safety legislation, such as primary seat belt law; enhanced enforcement coupled with education efforts; effective MnDOT, county and local engineering

improvements; and efficient emergency trauma response. Officials also credit safer vehicles for the trend.

A critical statistic to determine road safety is the death rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT). DPS estimates the 2011 VMT will be 0.65, which would be the lowest ever for Minnesota. In 2010, the state VMT fatality rate was less than one person (0.72) — the second lowest in the nation, surpassed only by Massachusetts — and down from a rate of 5.52 in 1966.

Preliminary 2011 Traffic Statistics:

- The preliminary 367 fatality count includes motorists (284 — down from the final 305 number in 2010), motorcyclists (42 — down from 45); pedestrians (37 — up from 36); and bicyclists (five — down from nine).
- 2011 preliminary DWI arrests — 28,573. There were 29,918 DWI arrests in 2010. 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. In 2010, there were 131 alcohol-related deaths, the lowest death count on record since being tracked in 1984.
- 2011's deadliest months — October (51), July (47) and August (37). The safest months were January (15), March (18) and April (23).

13 Counties Targeted for Increased DWI Patrols in 2011

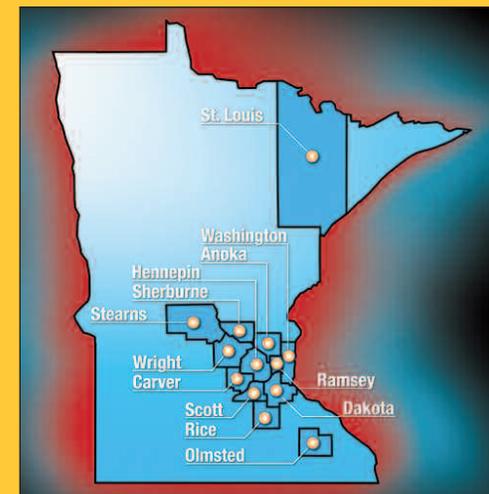
Targeted, high-visibility DWI enforcement campaigns are factoring in the continued decline of alcohol-related traffic deaths in Minnesota. While 2011 alcohol-related crash data won't be available until spring, OTS officials estimate the drunk and impaired crash figures will be lower than 2010, which was the lowest on record.

To support this trend in 2012, heightened DWI enforcement will roll out in the 13 counties with the highest combined number of alcohol-related deaths and serious injuries: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Olmsted, Ramsey, Rice, St. Louis, Scott, Sherburne, Stearns, Washington, and Wright.

These counties accounted for nearly half of the state's alcohol-related deaths (202) and half of the state's serious injuries (462) during 2008–2010.

“Increased DWI patrols are critical to prevent impaired driving behavior. The patrols aim to get people to think before they drink and plan for a sober ride,” says Jean Ryan, OTS impaired driving coordinator.

Alcohol-related crashes resulted in an average of 160 deaths during the last five years in Minnesota.



These 13 counties face extra DWI patrols in 2012.

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Motorcycle Operator Training 2012 Schedule



With the number of motorcycles and motorcyclists at record-high levels in Minnesota — almost 230,000 registered motorcycles and nearly 400,000 licensed operators —

rider training is popular and potentially life-saving. Without proper training, new riders are more likely to be involved in a crash. Experienced riders also can benefit from additional training to hone their crash-avoidance skills.

The Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center offers a wide variety of courses for all skill levels — from the Basic Rider Course for new riders wanting to earn their motorcycle endorsement to Civilian Police Motorcycle Courses where experienced riders can learn the same techniques that police motor officers use to stay safe. View the 2012 course schedule to find the right training at www.motorcyclesafety.org.

Traffic safety advocates are encouraged to share the news about classes in their communities.

Welcome to New Law Enforcement Liaisons

Law enforcement liaisons (LELs) are a valuable resource to local agencies on traffic enforcement and education programs.

OTS recently honored Bob O'Brien and Brad Kollman, who both recently retired from their LEL duties after two decades of service between them.

New LEL assignments:

- State Patrol veteran Dick Smith replaces Bob O'Brien as metro LEL.

- Former State Patrol lieutenant Scott McConkey assumes the LEL position previously held by Brad Kollman in southern Minnesota.
- Former deputy chief of Grand Rapids PD Frank Scherf is responsible for LEL duties in northeastern Minnesota.
- LEL veteran and former Fergus Falls PD captain Tom Kummrow will serve as LEL for northwestern Minnesota.

New Toward Zero Deaths Safe Road Grants

Local traffic safety advocates are tremendous assets to OTS and law enforcement partners to help advance safe driving messages and efforts.

This year, OTS is funding 22 community coalitions through the *Toward Zero Deaths* Safe Roads grant program.

TZD Safe Roads incorporates three elements to support traffic safety: the development of local coalitions (building diverse community partnerships that focus on traffic safety); conducting fatal review committees to analyze community traffic deaths; and the identification of practices/strategies that might have prevented the crashes.

TZD Safe Roads grants focus on connecting crash data and statewide efforts with local

collaborations and activities. These groups also make use of research and evaluation studies that point to the activities and best practices for the greatest impact in reducing traffic deaths and serious crashes.

The counties awarded for grants are: Beltrami, Crow Wing, Dodge, Douglas, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Isanti, Kanabec, Kandiyohi, Morrison, Mower, Olmsted, Otter Tail, Rice, Northern St. Louis/Eastern Itasca, Southern St. Louis/Carlton, Sherburne, Steele, Wabasha, Winona and Wright.

For more information, visit the [TZD Safe Roads Partners page](#).

Buckle Up, Teens! TV Contest

Minnesota teens in grades 9–12 who produce 30-second TV public service announcements promoting seat belt use could win \$1,000 and see their commercial air during the televised MTV Video Music Awards in 2012.

[The Buckle Up, Teens! TV Commercial Challenge](#) is sponsored by OTS and AAA Minnesota/Iowa. The deadline for entries is Monday, April 16. Rules and entry forms are online at ots.dps.mn.gov.

Finalists will be selected by OTS and AAA Minnesota/Iowa for a public online vote in May. AAA Minnesota/Iowa will award first-, second- and third-place winners with \$1,000, \$600 and \$400, respectively.

“We see solid belt use for kids up until about age 15, but once they start riding with their peers, belt use drops off,” says Gordy Pehrson, DPS youth programs coordinator. “This contest gives teens a chance to encourage their peers to belt up.”

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in Minnesota due to driver inexperience, risk-taking behavior, distractions, nighttime driving, speeding and seat belt non-use. In Minnesota during 2008–2010, 100 teen vehicle occupants (ages 13–19), were killed and only 39 were belted.

[View the 2011 and previous years' finalists](#)

Leading Causes of Teen Deaths, 2001–2010 (ages 15–17)

Traffic crashes:	346
Suicide:	180
Unintentional injury:	99
Cancer:	80
Homicide:	67

State's Belt Use Reaches Record 93 Percent

Proper Use of Boosters Still Lags

Minnesota's seat belt use rate has reached a record high of nearly 93 percent, up from 92.3 percent in 2010. However, proper use of booster seats is just 64 percent, according to observational surveys conducted.

Since June 2009, when the state's primary seat belt law became effective, the number of unbelted deaths has dropped 10 percent, and the number of unbelted severe injuries has dropped 5 percent. Belt use was 74 percent a decade ago.

"This high belt use rate means more Minnesotans will survive crashes and families won't be torn apart by these preventable tragedies," says Department of Public Safety Commissioner Mona Dohman. "Our challenge is to encourage those who continue to put their lives at risk to buckle up."

Following are top-line findings from the belt and booster surveys.

Seat Belt Survey

OTS recorded belt use of 11,000 motorists in 37 counties during two weeks in August 2011:

- Statewide seat belt use rate: 92.7 percent.
- Use by vehicle type: van — 96 percent; car — 94; SUV — 92.5; pickup — 88. (Pickup occupant use has improved from 81 percent five years ago).
- Use by gender: females — 95 percent; males — 90 percent. This gap continues to close; the primary belt law has influenced

more males to buckle up. Five years ago, female belt use was 92 percent and the male rate was 84.

- Belt use rate by age: 65 and older — 96 percent; 30–64 — 93; 0–10 — 93; 11–15 — 93; 16–29 — 92. Teen/young adult use continues to improve, up from 84 percent five years ago.

Booster Survey

During 2007–2009, only 44 percent of booster-age children (ages 4–7) involved in crashes were riding in booster seats. In the

year since the law became effective (July 1, 2009), the percentage of children in boosters increased to 59 percent.

Boosters are for children who have outgrown a

forward-facing harnessed restraint (typically age 4 and 40–60 pounds). Boosters are required for children until they are age 8 or 4 feet 9 inches tall, whichever comes first.

This was this first year OTS recorded booster use. The survey included 3,759 children in 32 counties:

- Children properly restrained in a booster seat — 64 percent.
- Female caregivers more likely than males to put children in boosters.
- If the driver was not belted, only 27 percent of the children were in a booster.



Seat belt compliance is at a record-high in Minnesota.

Belt Patrols Go Country

Seat belt use may be increasing overall in the state, but in 10 Greater Minnesota counties, many motorists still aren't clicking it. As a result, those motorists may be getting a ticket.

In April, increased seat belt patrols will hit the roads in these counties where only 38 percent of the 183 motorists killed were buckled up over the last three years. Among the 566 seriously injured in crashes during this same timeframe, only half were belted.

Targeted Counties for April Belt Patrols

- Cass
- Itasca
- Mille Lacs
- Morrison
- Olmsted
- Renville
- Rice
- Stearns
- St. Louis
- Winona

Each year, 80 percent of the unbelted deaths in Minnesota occur in Greater Minnesota.

"Belt use outside the Twin Cities is historically lower due to cultural reasons and motorists having a false sense of security on rural, low-traffic roads," says Jean Ryan, of OTS. "More must be focused toward these regions to increase and sustain belt use, and this enforcement is one tactic."

The campaign serves as a precursor to the statewide and nationwide May *Click It or Ticket* effort, May 21–June 3.



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



Driving Momentum Forward

Donna Berger, Director, Office of Traffic Safety

Minnesota has an exceptional, dedicated traffic safety family, and each member of this group has helped advance the vision of limiting

deaths and injuries. As the new director of the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), I am very excited to be part of this group and am very happy to be working with so many exceptional partners to build on our accomplishments.

I have worked at OTS for six years and know many of you. During this experience, I have gained an understanding of your challenges and learned what OTS can do to better support your activities. My focus will be to ensure OTS enforcement and educational programming is effective and can be successfully carried forward by you, our partners.

What has been clear over the years has been your commitment to safer Minnesota roads. And nowhere was this commitment better demonstrated than at the *Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)* conference in November, attended by more than 700 law enforcement officers, advocates, engineers, EMS and others. It is encouraging to have such a strong network driving our progress.

We have succeeded in significantly reducing preventable tragedies. According to preliminary reports, there were 367 deaths in 2011, representing the first year Minnesota has reported fewer than 400 deaths since 1944. This represents a 35 percent reduction in deaths from a decade ago and a fourth-consecutive annual drop in fatalities. Meanwhile, seat belt use is at a record high and impaired driving injuries and deaths and DWIs continue a downward swing.

To propel our momentum in 2012, OTS and MnDOT currently have five *TZD* regional partnerships operating in the northeast, southeast and south central parts of the state. Two more *TZD* regional partnerships in the west central and central regions of the state will start up in 2012. These regional efforts serve as critical conduits in building locals partnerships and delivering the *TZD* vision to those communities.

Our vision includes a goal that is within reach — 350 or fewer deaths by 2014. With your ongoing support, we can help motorists make the safe decisions behind the wheel to further reduce Minnesota road deaths.

Thank you for being such hard-working partners. I look forward to hearing your ideas on how to improve our efforts.

Have a safe winter.

Legendary Liaisons Honored at TZD Conference

More than 700 traffic safety partners attended the *Toward Zero Deaths* conference in Duluth last November, the largest conference to-date. The two-day event brings together law enforcement, engineers, EMS, child passenger safety technicians, advocates and others to learn best-practices and new information to advance traffic safety in Minnesota.

A highlight of the conference was the honoring of law enforcement liaisons Brad Kollman and Bob O'Brien, who retired in 2011. O'Brien joined OTS after 32 years with Minneapolis PD; he served 17 years as a liaison. Kollman worked 30 years with the St. Peter PD and 13 years as a liaison.

"OTS will always have a special place in our hearts for Bob and Brad," says Donna Berger, OTS director. "They were more than just colleagues, they were family."



New OTS Director Donna Berger (left) and MnDOT's Sue Groth with Brad Kollman and Bob O'Brien, recipients of the Kathy Swanson Outstanding Service Award.