



News Release

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State Highway Safety Agencies Respond to 2004 Highway Fatality Projection

Statement for Attribution to Lt. Colonel Jim Champagne, Chair of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA)

Washington, DC— Today, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) released the 2004 preliminary report of highway injuries and fatalities. The report indicates that in 2004 there were 42,800 highway deaths overall, compared to 42,643 in 2003. The death rate per million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has reached another historic low—1.46 deaths per VMT compared to 1.48 in 2003.

GHSA is pleased with the achievement in the mileage death rate, but is very concerned and disappointed to see overall fatalities increase. While progress has been made, more must be done to reach highway safety goals for the nation. The substantial increase in motorcycle fatalities is most troubling. This marks the seventh straight year of increases in motorcycle fatalities. To combat this, states must adopt comprehensive motorcycle safety programs that include mandatory helmet laws for riders of all ages. Only my home state of Louisiana has enacted a helmet law in the last decade----shocking given the grim fatality numbers.

I am disappointed to learn that 56 percent of occupants killed in crashes were not wearing safety belts. States must continue to seek enactment of primary safety belt laws and to conduct high-visibility 'Click it or Ticket' programs that are proven effective ways to get the public to buckle up. We are pleased with the record high seat belt use rate nationally, but clearly, not everyone has gotten the message.

It's troubling to see that the number of fatal crashes involving young drivers has slightly increased. Although more than two-thirds of states have graduated licensing programs, many of the states need to strengthen these programs.

Speeding-related fatalities and injuries were down very slightly, but continue to be one of the most critical highway safety issues facing the nation. The most recent data indicate that speed is a factor in 31 percent of all highway fatalities. To remedy this, GHSA is coordinating a national forum on reducing excessive speeding. The forum, which is funded by the U.S. DOT, will be held in June and will result in recommendations for addressing this challenging problem.

While GHSA is concerned that nearly 43,000 of our citizens are needlessly dying, there is some good news:

- Alcohol-related fatalities declined 2.1 percent, the second straight year of declines. While improvements have been made in reducing fatalities involving low blood alcohol content (BAC), high BACs and repeat offenders continue to contribute to the large number of impaired driving fatalities and injuries.
- Injuries declined 4.6 percent, which can be linked to the positive gains made in seat belt use.
- Pedestrian deaths declined 3.2 percent.

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To view the projected 2004 highway fatality data, visit www.nhtsa.dot.gov .

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is the nonprofit association representing the highway safety agencies of states, territories, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Indian Nation. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans. For more information, contact GHSA at (202) 789-0942 or visit www.ghsa.org.

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