

Motor Vehicle Occupants

From 2008 to 2012 in Washington State, 1,590 people ages under one-year-old to over 85, died while riding in or driving a motor vehicle, excluding motorcycles. This is an average of 313 each year, or 26.5 per month. Between 2008 and 2012, 10,099 were hospitalized for injuries, averaging 2,020 each year, or 168 each month. Many of these were life-altering, such as traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, burns, and other major trauma. Even though the number of deaths and injuries among motor vehicle occupants has decreased greatly, there is much more we can do. **Most crashes are not accidents – they are predictable and therefore preventable.**

Key Messages to Help Reduce Risks

- ◆ The Washington State Patrol, Department of Transportation, Washington Traffic Safety Commission, and other traffic experts estimate 85 percent of traffic crashes are caused by human error – not roads, weather, or vehicle issues. The human errors include:
 - Speeding
 - Driving impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs
 - Being distracted by many things: phones, texts, passengers, eating, grooming, etc.
 - Following too closely
 - Lack of sleep
 - Aggressive driving
 - Risky lane changes
- ◆ When crashes cannot be avoided, wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of death by 60 percent and the risk of serious injury by about 55 percent. In 2012, Washington State had a seat belt use rate of 97.5 – the highest in the U.S. that year.
- ◆ Because traffic crashes are a leading cause of death and disability, preventing them helps save lives and money. In the U.S., crashes cost over \$150 billion each year.
- ◆ Most fatal crashes happen on rural roads – they have more turns, more hazards to hit when a vehicle leaves the road, less lighting, little or no shoulders, are less traveled so when a crash happens it may not be noticed for some time, and it takes emergency medical services longer to respond.
- ◆ The age groups at most risk are teens and young adults. Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of all deaths for teenagers, even though they have a lower rate of being licensed.
- ◆ Even if you are a safe, legal driver many people are not – all roadway users are at risk.

Reduce Your Risks

- Keep your eyes AND your mind on the road. Avoid distractions such as texting, talking on hand-held or hands-free cell phones, personal grooming, eating, etc.
- Scan ahead, from to side, and prepare for the unexpected, such as: an animal or child darting into the road, an impaired pedestrian, an erratic driver, something falling off a vehicle in front of you, road debris, a sudden lane change with no warning, etc.

- Everyone in the vehicle must wear their seat belt correctly every time on every trip.
- Drive drug free and sober every time.
- Drive the speed limit... AND drive lower speeds in heavy traffic, bad weather, or rainy, icy, and snowy road conditions.
- Reduce rushing and stress by leaving enough time to get where you need to go. Allow time for possible delays.
- When changing lanes, check and double-check rear-view mirrors and back-up cameras in newer models; and use your turn signal, do not tail gate, and give space.

All roadway users have the same rights and responsibilities to make vehicle travel as safe as possible for everyone.

Information and Resources

- American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation www.aaafoundation.org
- Injury & Violence Prevention Guide, Washington State, 2013 [Motor Vehicle-Related Injuries \(PDF\)](#)
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety www.iihs.org
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration www.nhtsa.gov
- Safe Kids Washington www.safekidswashington.org
- Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org
- Washington State Patrol www.wsp.wa.gov
- Washington Traffic Safety Commission www.wtsc.wa.gov

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