

Eisenhower State Office Building
700 SW Harrison
Topeka, KS 66603



phone: 785-296-3585
fax: 785-296-0287
www.ksdot.org

Mike King, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

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News contact: Chris Bortz, (785) 296-3756; cbortz@ksdot.org
or
Neal Thurman, (816) 842-8111; nthurman@trozzolo.com

Roadway Fatalities – A Public Health Crisis

Traffic Safety Advocates not satisfied with recent reductions in fatalities

It's an outrage, and the Kansas Department of Transportation has teamed up with other safety advocates to drive home an important message: Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for people ages 4-34, and should be considered a public health crisis.

"We want to make people aware of the fact that these tragedies are not 'accidents.' They are violent, and they are preventable," said KDOT Secretary, Mike King. "We are losing nearly 400 people every year, and if that many people were dying from a single disease, we'd be doing something about it. We'd do research, develop a vaccine, issue health alerts, and hopefully come up with a cure."

Safety advocates say that when people see only a few severe crashes in their immediate community, they miss the magnitude of the situation. That's why they have developed a graphic to announce the statewide year-to-date fatalities. The data, along with a few relevant statistics, will be updated monthly on www.KTSRO.org.

Additionally, the Kansas Highway Patrol is doing a public service announcement for radio stations to stress the enormity of the problem. In the PSA, they compare the year-to-date loss to wiping a town of that size off the map. "Unfortunately, we have to name a larger town each month," said Captain Scott Harrington.

According to Jim Hanni, Executive VP of Public Affairs for AAA Allied Group, "The ultimate message is that Kansans should be outraged about the number of people

who die every year on our roadways. More and more people are taking action to prevent serious injury or death by buckling up, but most of these crashes could be prevented altogether if people would just pay attention to the number-one task at hand...driving.”

“It’s not just cell phones and texting, although that is the issue that’s making the biggest headlines lately,” agreed King. “Drivers have to be aware of speed, weather conditions, construction, deer, and so much more. It only takes a second for your mind to wander...and your car ends up wandering, too. Add alcohol, which despite all our prevention efforts, is *still* a factor in about a third of all fatality crashes, and you have an even bigger problem.”

There is a glimmer of hope, according to KDOT. The unofficial year-to-date fatalities through June totaled 180, which is a drop of about 13% from the past ten years’ average. Harrington said, “It’s a start, but those are still 180 people whose families have received a death notification. Too many friends and families are grieving over something that could have been prevented with a little more caution.”

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