

Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Austin, Texas
Permit No. 2771



Texas Traffic Safety Report

April, 1980

Traffic Safety Section

Vol. VIII No. 4

U.S. FATALITIES TOP 50,000 — TEXAS TRAFFIC DEATHS OVER 4,200

In spite of last spring's gasoline shortage and increased enforcement of the 55 mph speed limit, traffic fatalities in Texas and throughout the country increased in 1979.

Traffic fatalities in the United States topped the 50,000 mark again last year the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) recently announced. And preliminary reports from the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) estimate the state death toll at over 4200. Final reports from DPS will be available at the end of April.

Nationally, an estimated 50,745 people died in traffic accidents in 1979, an increase of 0.8 percent over the 1978 total of 50,327. The difference in the actual death count was 418.

In Texas, preliminary counts indicate the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel was 4.3 in 1979. Fatalities on rural roads are estimated at 57 percent of the total statewide death toll. DPS also estimates a 30 percent fatality increase on county roads as well as a 10 percent increase in urban areas.

DPS projects 101.88 billion vehicle miles were traveled in the state during 1979, which was 744 million miles less than 1978 (indicating a 1.7 percent decrease in travel).

Joan Claybrook, head of the DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said "the rise occurred despite a small decrease in the number of miles traveled, a shortage of gasoline during part of the

heavily traveled summer months and a substantial increase in prices for fuel."

Claybrook expressed concern over a continuing trend begun in 1977 of an increasing number of fatalities involving motorcycles (up 6.4 percent); light trucks and vans (up 7 percent); and heavy duty trucks (up 4 percent). While deaths to occupants of passenger cars

final numbers are expected to change only slightly.

Claybrook noted that speed did not appear to play the same major role in increasing the 1979 deaths, as it did in several preceding years. The proportion of fatalities on high speed roads declined slightly from 54 percent in 1978 to 53 percent in 1979, and deaths

25 percent in 1977 to 27 percent in 1978 and to 30 percent in 1979. However, the small car population has risen dramatically since the Iranian oil crisis.

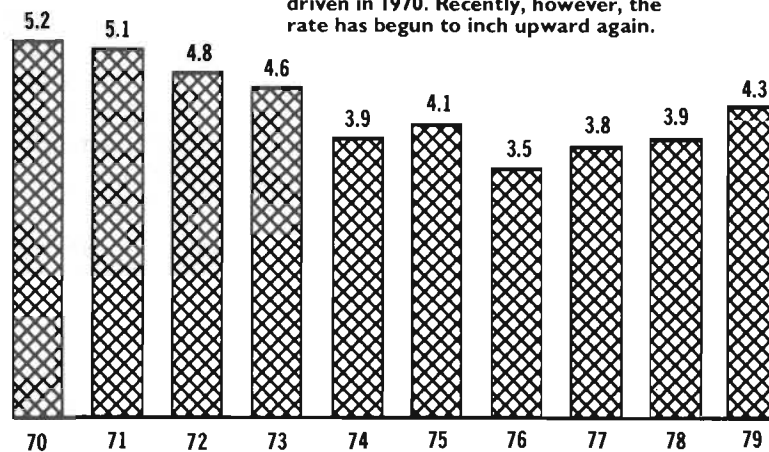
Other statistics cited show that:

- Since 1975, motorcycle deaths have increased a staggering 52 percent, and last year's total of 4,850 was an all-time high. This has followed revocation or weakening of helmet use laws in 27 states.
- Since 1975, deaths to occupants of pickup trucks and vans also have increased 52 percent and occupant fatalities in heavy trucks have gone up 46 percent. But the number of truck registrations has risen only 30 percent during that period.
- Passenger car occupant deaths in 1979 are estimated at 27,280, a 3 percent decline. This is due in large part to federal motor vehicle safety standards. Using General Accounting Office procedures, NHTSA estimates that its safety standards have saved more than 55,000 lives between 1968 and 1978.
- Pedestrian deaths are estimated at 7,790, virtually the same as in 1978.
- Since 1975, fatalities have increased more in the western states, 28 percent, than any other geographical area in the United States.

Fighting the Battle for Highway Safety

DEATH RATE
PER 100 MILLION
MILES DRIVEN

Due to improved highway design, increased traffic safety efforts, and lower speed limits, the rate of traffic deaths has steadily dropped on Texas highways, from 5.2 deaths per every 100 million miles driven in 1970. Recently, however, the rate has begun to inch upward again.



declined 3 percent below the 1978 total, the number of persons killed riding in small cars was up, although the percentage increase was not determined immediately.

The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel rose to 3.33 deaths in 1979, slightly higher than the 3.25 recorded in 1978. All of the figures are preliminary since the statistical data collected by NHTSA is incomplete, but the

on the interstate system decreased by 8 percent. It is too early to tell whether the 1979 reduction is due to less travel on high speed roads or to the possibility that compliance with the 55 mph speed limit has improved. Indications are that more drivers are observing 55, she said.

Of the passenger car occupants killed in two-car collisions, the proportion of deaths in subcompact cars rose from

WANTED: NAME/ADDRESS

The current Appropriations Act (Article V, Section 66c, H.B. 558, 66th Legislature, 1979) requires all state newsletters and other periodicals to present a notice in three consecutive issues indicating "that anyone desiring to continue to receive the publication must so indicate in writing. The agency shall furnish future publications only to those persons requesting."

To remain on the mailing list, all must respond prior to June 1, 1980, by returning this notice, properly signed and dated, with the above mailing box and corrected label to:

Texas Traffic Safety Report
D-18 TS
S.D.H.P.T.
11th and Brazos
Austin, TX 78701

Yes, I wish to continue the
Texas Traffic Safety Report.

Signature

Address

Date



State Department of Highways
and Public Transportation



Texas drivers may be forgetting the message presented by these children.

TEXANS DRIVE FRIENDLY? — — GUESS AGAIN

By Phil Reynolds
Public Education Specialist

So you think Texans really "drive friendly?" You figure we're all pretty safe on the road? The National Safety



Council says you're wrong. The Safety Council publishes a monthly list of traffic death records in the U.S. cities it samples. In each population group the "number one" city has the best record—that is, the fewest traffic deaths per 10,000 vehicles registered in that city.

Let's see how we stack up against the rest of the country in the latest National Safety Council listings:

One Texas city—Houston—is among the four in the "1,000,000 and over" bracket. It has the worst record of the four.

Of three cities with populations between 750,000 and 1,000,000 on the list, two are in Texas. Dallas has the worst record; San Antonio is next.

The list includes no Texas cities sampled in the 500,000 - 750,000 population bracket.

El Paso is our only entry on

the 350,000 - 500,000 list. Only Atlanta, Oklahoma City and Nashville, of the 13 cities sampled, have worse records.

Two Texas cities—Corpus Christi and Austin—are among the 20 on the 200,000 - 350,000 list. Corpus Christi's traffic death record is exceeded only by Virginia Beach, VA. Austin is third-worst, right behind Corpus Christi.

The 66 cities in the 100,000 - 200,000 bracket include four in Texas—Garland, Lubbock, Beaumont and Arlington. Of those four, Garland has the best traffic death record...but it's 16th down the list. Arlington, at the other end of the scale is 64th of 66.

And of the 146 cities sampled in the 50,000 - 100,000 population group, the second-worst traffic death record belongs to Pasadena, TX. The best Texas city in the group is San Angelo; it's 72nd.

Finally, Lufkin has Texas' best traffic death record of the 178 listings in the 25,000 - 50,000 population bracket. It's 70th.

The conclusion: It appears that we Texans don't drive quite as friendly as many of us would like to believe. And police officers say the biggest

killers on the roadway are speed and alcohol.

Listings like the National Safety Council's are only numbers on a piece of paper—until it's you or a friend who's involved in an accident. The solution is simple: don't drive too fast, and don't drive after you've had too much to drink...and to be extra safe, wear your seat belt. It's a small price to pay, considering what the hospital and insurance costs would be otherwise.



Most studies reveal that over half of all motorcycle accidents are caused by motorists who said they either didn't see the cyclist at all or didn't see him until it was too late: Street intersections are the worst danger zones. Both bikers and drivers should be looking for each other. The most frequent cause of a motorcycle accident is believed to be the result of a motorist turning directly into an oncoming cycle's path.

DIRECTORS CONFER ON ENFORCEMENT

By Mike West, Traffic Safety Specialist

A Selective Traffic Enforcement Directors Conference was held during January at the Criminal Justice Center on the campus of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville. The training was for 37 traffic supervisors and traffic safety personnel currently operating increased traffic enforcement programs in their cities, counties, or districts.

The meeting was the first statewide gathering of traffic enforcement program directors for the purpose of comparing programs, sharing ideas and receiving training.

Topics covered in the conference included: problem iden-

Parsons on the Beaumont Traffic Enforcement Program (See Beaumont S.T.E.P. in Texas Traffic Safety Report, November 1979.) Lt. Chuck Pilant of the Texarkana, Texas, Police Department said, "You can operate a traffic enforcement program for years and feel that you are making progress, but another officer from a different department can suggest solutions and techniques that help your local program".

The conference participants were selected from the nearly 120 Traffic Enforcement programs being funded by the Traffic Safety Section of the State Department of Highways



tification, scheduling, officer deployment, traffic enforcement techniques, evaluation, data/record keeping and group discussions.

Highlights of the conference included a presentation by Maj.

and Public Transportation from across the state.

The training program was funded by the Traffic Safety Section, and coordinated by Bob Williams of that office.

STUDY LINKS ILLITERACY

TO HIGH AUTO WRECK RATE

DETROIT(AP)—People who have poor reading skills tend to be involved in many more traffic accidents than people with adequate reading skills, a North Carolina researcher says.

Patricia F. Waller, associate director of driver studies at the University of North Carolina's Highway Safety Research Center, told the Society of Automotive Engineers national convention Thursday that a study of 26,000 drivers showed a strong correlation between

reading skills and accident rates.

She said half of the drivers in the North Carolina study were given a written test to qualify for their drivers' licenses while the other half were given an oral test because they were unable to read well enough to take the written exam.

The drivers who took the oral exam had 24 percent more accidents in which they were at fault than those who took the written test, she said.



GUEST EDITORIAL

DPS COMMENDED

(Reprinted with permission from Amarillo Globe-Times)

Stepped-up efforts by the Texas Department of Public Safety to catch motorists exceeding the 55 mph speed limit warrant praise from all Texans.

Whether we like it or not, 55 mph is the legal speed limit—and motorists should adhere to the law. If they don't, they should be cited for violating it.

Driving too fast and driving while intoxicated are the leading factors in Texas highway fatalities—and efforts to control both are vital.

The DPS plan to reduce the number of speeding motorists on Texas highways includes some new techniques. Among these techniques will be the stationing of troopers in unmarked patrol cars and other types of vehicles.

"We have some unmarked units now, but we'll probably be using pickups, vans and even roadgraders," said Capt. Bob Russell, head of the Amarillo District of the DPS. "We'll use what we can to run a radar unit out of, not just an auto."

A similar plan was started in Illinois and the number of speeding drivers was reduced to 6 percent of the total number of motorists on that state's highways. According to statistics for 1979, 70 percent of the drivers on Texas highways were speeding. And during that year, more than 4,000 persons were killed in traffic deaths.

Russel said "Texas is the worst in the nation about violating the speed limit."

But, if the DPS has its way—and we hope it does—things are going to change.

Since speeders won't be able to spot those familiar black-and-white DPS vehicles now, they may voluntarily slow down. If they don't, troopers in pickups, roadgraders and other type vehicles will make sure they do.

We commend the DPS for the "more aggressive enforcement action" and for the sake of all Texans, we hope the effort is successful.

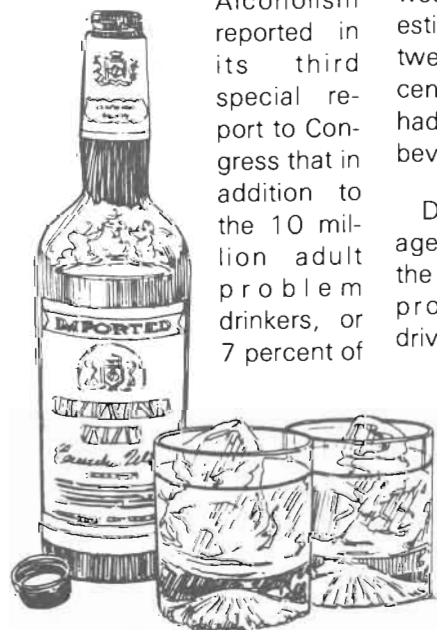
TEENAGERS SUFFER ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Government reports indicate that many U.S. teenagers suffer from problems related to alcohol abuse. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism reported in its third special report to Congress that in addition to the 10 million adult problem drinkers, or 7 percent of

all adults, an estimated 3.3 million youths aged 14-17 have drinking problems ranging from trouble at school to car accidents often caused by weekend binges. It is also estimated that 93 percent of all twelfth grade boys and 87 percent of all twelfth grade girls had experience with alcoholic beverages.

Drivers 15 to 24 years of age experience trouble on the highways far beyond their proportion of the total driving population. They make up about 21 percent of all drivers, yet are involved in 35 percent of all traffic accidents, 33 percent of all traffic fatalities, and about 68 percent of all fatal accidents in which alcohol is involved.



DRUNK DRIVERS EXECUTED

The following article was published in the Automobile Club Insurance Company of Columbus, Ohio "Miniature Messages" in October 1979.

DRUNK DRIVERS . . . In South Africa, a drunk driver is given a ten-year prison sentence, or a fine of \$10,000, or both. In Australia, the names of drunk drivers are sent to local papers and printed under the headline, "He's drunk and in jail." In Malaysia, the driver is jailed; if he is married, his wife goes to jail also. In Turkey, drunk drivers are taken 20 miles from town by police and forced to walk back—under escort. In San Salvador, drunk drivers are executed by firing squads.

By these standards, America is pretty lenient!

AROUND THE STATE

DALLAS--A bicycle rodeo training session was held for 40 police officials.

PORT ARTHUR--Two elementary school teachers workshops were held at Sam Houston and Booker T. Washington Elementary Schools for 80 teachers and principals.

VIDOR--More than 120 children toured a Safety Town set up at a local shopping center.

BEAUMONT--A traffic safety program was held for 23 volunteer leaders during a Volunteer Safety Leaders Workshop sponsored by the Texas Safety Association.

TEXAS CITY--College of the Mainland's Office of Traffic Safety, in cooperation with the Texas Motorcycle Roadriders Association, conducted 8 Motorcycle Rider Courses and trained 88 students.

PORT ARTHUR--Two bicycle assemblies, bicycle inspections, and bicycle rodeos were held at Carver and Dick Dowling Elementary Schools for 750 students.

BEAUMONT--Thirty-three police officers became certified breathalyzer operators.

MEDIA URGED TO COVER ALCOHOL-RELATED CRASHES

By helping identify alcohol as a factor in automobile crashes, the news media can motivate community action to control drunk driving, according to a Department of Transportation (DOT) publication titled *The Alcohol Crash Story: A News Media Guide*.

Mailed to both radio and television stations and newspapers throughout the country, the booklet includes facts about alcohol with suggestions for programming and news and feature writing. "By inquiring into the community's methods of arresting, adjudicating, and rehabilitating drunk drivers, the press can help officials and the public improve its system for controlling drunk driving and for returning the problem drinker/driver to health and productivity," the booklet says.

Alcohol is involved in about half of all fatal crashes, with many victims being drunk pedestrians, according to the DOT. Teenagers are especially a risk because they are inexperienced both with driving and

with drinking. Riding in an automobile is the single greatest hazard young people in America face—greater than drugs, disease, suicide, or war, reports the DOT.

According to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey, the American public is unwilling to limit drinking by friends in social situations, with the exception of serving food with drinks at a party to reduce intoxication. They are, however, willing to offer help to intoxicated friends—driving them home, letting them stay overnight, or calling a cab. "Concern for tragic consequences such as an accident involving death or injury in-

creases people's willingness to take appropriate action," the survey indicated.

The DOT publication calls on the news media to help educate the public to recognize the drunk driving hazard. "Reporting the consequences of alcohol crashes in the media can help to emphasize the danger to the public and encourage preventive action."

A free copy of the booklet may be requested from Mrs.

Eleanor Kitts, General Services Division, NAD-42, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington, D.C. 20540.



FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS DRIVE DRUNK



NHTSA SEEKS COMFORTABLE SAFETY BELTS

In an effort to raise the current low rate of safety belt use, the U.S. Department of Transportation recently proposed requirements designed to improve the comfort and convenience of safety belts installed in new vehicles.

The proposal, prepared by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), would be effective Sept. 1, 1981. It would apply to manual lap belts and automatic belts installed in cars, and to manual belts installed in light trucks and vans weighing less than 10,000 pounds.

The agency's proposal addresses these aspects of seat belt design:

- Uncomfortable shoulder belt fit
- Excessive shoulder belt pressure
- Inconvenient operation of motorized automatic belts
- Inconsistent shoulder and lap belt retraction
- Inaccessible latch plates

Also proposed is a modification of the warning system (visible and audible reminders) requirements for both manual and automatic belts to increase



the current rate of manual belt use and to warn front seat occupants when automatic belts have been disconnected.

The proposed standard would not apply to manual lap and shoulder combination belts installed in the front seats of passenger cars, since these systems will start to be phased out in passenger cars when the automatic restraint requirements (air bags or automatic belts) become effective beginning with the 1982 model year cars.

PROPER RESTRAINTS REDUCE DEATHS

CHICAGO (AP)—Two Maryland researchers say evidence that traffic death rates among infants probably are much higher than those among older children shows the need to restrain babies with belts or special seats that provide better protection.

The researchers say infants are more fragile than older children and are often held in their mother's arms, contributing to a higher accident death rate.

"The most important point is the need for the child to be properly restrained in cars either in a child restraint or under seat belts," said Susan Baker, associate professor at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. "Proper restraints do not include those little plastic baby holders and do not include being held in somebody else's arms."

Mrs. Baker and another researcher investigated the circumstances surrounding traffic deaths of 89 children under the age of 15. The results were

published in the Dec. 28 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Mrs. Baker said she and University of Maryland medical student Jerome J. Karwacki wanted to know why the death rate among infants was six times that of older children in the group they studied.

They looked at the seating position of the children, the types of injuries and types of restraints used. Of the 89 fatalities they studied, children had been wearing restraints in only three cases and eight of the 13 infants had been riding on the lap of an adult, Mrs. Baker said.

Almost half of the children in the study were sitting in rear seats, suggesting that without restraints, seating children in the back does not provide enough protection.

Mrs. Baker said the study also suggests that infants, whose heads are still soft and developing, are more susceptible to serious head injury and have less ability to recover.



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD CRITICIZES MULTIPLE LICENSES OF COMMERCIAL DRIVERS

The National Transportation Safety Board recently called for improved procedures to detect problem commercial drivers, particularly drivers who use multiple licenses to spread traffic convictions among two or more states. The Board said the National Driver Register—an index of drivers whose driving privilege has been revoked or denied by a state—should be revised to allow states and motor carriers to more easily identify commercial drivers convicted of repeated traffic violations. The Board investigated 44 heavy truck accidents involving problem commercial drivers as part of a "Safety Effectiveness Evaluation of Detection and Control of Unsafe Interstate Commercial Drivers Through the National Driver Register, State Driver Licensing Policies, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations." The composite records of the 44 drivers showed that they held a total of 63 driver licenses. In addition, the records listed 98 driver license suspensions, 104 traffic accidents, and 456 traffic convictions. Single copies of the report may be obtained without charge by writing to the Publications Branch, National Transportation Safety Board, Washington, D.C. 20594.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

An official study shows that, when a driver is involved in a single car accident hitting a tree or pole, more than 6 in every 10 have positive alcohol readings.

DUBLIN, IRELAND

From Dublin comes news that drivers and front seat passengers are now required by law to buckle their seat belts. Fines for non-compliance are up to twenty pounds—or more than forty dollars.



This newsletter is an official publication of the Traffic Safety Section of the Safety and Maintenance Division—and is intended to inform the public on the traffic safety programs in Texas. Contributing articles from outside sources are the reflected opinions of the author and not necessarily those of the Traffic Safety Section. Permission is granted for reproduction of articles or photographs, except where the publication has obtained permission from other sources and provided credit. The Texas Traffic Safety Report is published monthly. Comments or contributions should be sent to:

TEXAS TRAFFIC SAFETY REPORT
Traffic Safety Section
S.D.H.P.T.
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 452-8141
 Susan Bryant, Public Education Programs