What NHTSA Data Show About Traffic Deaths

Federal crash data shows how many people die on American roads each year and which driver behaviors are involved. Every figure below comes from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and each one is tied to its data year. A car accident lawyer might use numbers like these for context, but statistics describe patterns across many crashes, not what happened in a single one.

Total traffic deaths

According to NHTSA, 39,254 people died in traffic crashes in 2024, for a rate of 1.19 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Its early estimate for 2025 was 36,640 deaths, a 6.7 percent decrease from 2024, with a rate of 1.10 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Early estimates change once each year's data is finalized, so the 2025 number may move.

Speeding and impaired driving

NHTSA reports that 11,288 people died in speeding-related crashes in 2024, and speeding was a contributing factor in 29 percent of all traffic fatalities that year. The agency also reports that 11,904 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2024, which it describes as one person every 44 minutes. Roughly 30 percent of all traffic fatalities involve drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of *car accident lawyer* .08 or higher. Even lower levels matter. In 2024, 2,028 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in which a driver had a BAC of .01 to .07. Every state except Utah, which uses .05, sets the limit at a BAC of .08.

Distracted and drowsy driving

NHTSA states that 3,208 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2024. It notes that sending or reading a text takes a driver's eyes off the road for 5 seconds, about the length of a football field at 55 mph. Fatigue is harder to count. NHTSA estimates that in 2017, 91,000 police-reported crashes involved drowsy drivers, leading to about 50,000 https://caraccidentlawyers.wiki/reference/lawyers-and-fees/ injuries and nearly 800 deaths, and the agency says that figure is widely considered an underestimate.

Seat belts

NHTSA reports that 22,713 passenger vehicle occupants were killed in 2024, and nearly half of them, 48 percent, were unrestrained, based on known seat belt use. The national seat belt use rate was 91.3 percent in 2025. By NHTSA's estimate, seat belts saved 14,955 lives in 2017. In some states, not wearing a seat belt can be raised to reduce damages, while other states limit that defense. An auto accident attorney can explain the rule where the crash happened.

How to read crash data

The categories overlap. A single crash can count as both speeding-related and alcohol-impaired, so the totals cannot be added together. NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) is a census of fatal crashes, while the Crash Report Sampling System (CRSS) is a sample of police-reported crashes. FARS data and the annual Traffic Safety Facts reports come from NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis,

and many states publish crash data of their own. Such databases describe crashes but do not decide fault. A car accident attorney relies on the evidence in each claim, from the crash report to the medical records. This article is general information and not legal advice.