

# U.S. road deaths up 9% in first half of 2012; Michigan up 6.8%

By David Shepardson

Detroit News Washington Bureau

U.S. traffic deaths rose by 9 percent in the first half of 2012, the largest increase since the government began collecting detailed data on crashes in 1975.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said 16,290 people died on the nation's roads in the first six months of the year, up from 14,950 in the same period last year.

The 9 percent increase topped the previous high increase in road deaths in the first half — 6.4 percent in 1979.

NHTSA also said fatality rates on the nation's roads hit its highest level since 2009.

The rate was 1.12 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled — compared with 1.04 deaths per 100 million miles last year. It's the highest since 2009's 1.13 deaths per 100 million miles.

Road deaths were up 13.4 percent in the first three months of the year — in part because more people were traveling during an unseasonably warm winter — and up just 5.4 percent in the second quarter.

The increase — if it continues for the entire year — would end a steady decline in U.S. road deaths over the last seven years.

This year, Michigan road deaths are up 6.8 percent - or 44 deaths -- through Sept. 20, said Michael Prince, director of the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning.

"Once the year is over we can do some in-depth analysis and determine what the issues where," Prince said. But he said he agrees "that nice weather so early in the year is one of the prime suspects."

Traffic deaths in 2011 fell 1.7 percent — their lowest number since 1949.

NHTSA said 32,310 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes last year, down 1.7 percent over the 32,885 road deaths in 2010.

NHTSA spokeswoman Lynda Tran said "it's too soon to speculate on the contributing factors of any increase in deaths on our roadways. NHTSA is closely monitoring the data."

She noted that even with the spike, it's still far below prior years.

"It's important to note that the historic downward trend in traffic fatalities in the past several years," Tran said.

Traffic fatalities had been steadily declining over the last five years since hitting 42,708 in 2005, decreasing by about 26 percent from 2005 to 2011. The decline in road deaths in 2011 was smaller than 2010, when road deaths fell 2.9 percent.

Traffic deaths in Michigan fell 5 percent in 2011, while total crashes rose 1 percent.

The reduction comes after 2010, when Michigan was one of just five states reporting a rise in the number of people killed on the roads, up 8 percent.

Michigan traffic deaths fell from 937 in 2010 to 889 in 2011. Total crashes rose from 282,075 in 2010 to 284,049 in 2011. Police reported a 2 percent increase in crash-related injuries, up from 70,501 in 2010 to 71,796 in 2011.

Road deaths still account for about \$300 billion in yearly costs, with about 2.2 million people injured in the 5.4 million crashes reported to police annually - and crashes are the leading cause of death for Americans aged 5-34.

Part of the increase is attributable to Americans driving more.

NHTSA noted that vehicle travel increased by about 15.6 billion miles, or about a 1.1 percent, in the first six months.

In 2011, travel on U.S. roads fell to its lowest level since 2003. Last year, U.S. drivers logged 35.7 billion fewer miles over 2010 — down 1.2 percent — to 2.963 trillion miles.

Source: *The Detroit News*: <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120926/METRO05/209260393>

## Traffic fatalities up 9% in first half of 2012

By **Jim Barnett**, CNN

updated 6:40 AM EDT, Fri September 28, 2012



### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Spike is the highest since record keeping began in 1975
- Previous highest increase during the first half of the year was 6.4% in 1979
- American Automobile Association called this year's numbers "alarming"
- Deterioration of highways may be a contributing factor

**Washington (CNN)** -- The U.S. government reports a 9% increase in motor vehicle traffic fatalities for the first half of 2012, the largest jump during the first six months of any previous year since data was first collected in 1975.

A statistical projection from January through June estimates 16,290 people died in vehicular crashes this year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The previous highest increase during the first half of the year was 6.4% in 1979.

In releasing the report, the administration said, "While it is too soon to speculate on the contributing factors or potential implications of any increase on our roadways, it should be noted that the historic downward trend in traffic fatalities in the past several years... means any comparison will be to an unprecedented low baseline figure."

The government pointed out fatalities during the first half of the year have declined by about 27% from the recent high in 2006 (20,500 fatalities) to the first half of 2011 (14,950 fatalities.)

The American Automobile Association called this year's numbers "alarming."

"This news is very disturbing," Lon Anderson, spokesman for AAA Mid-Atlantic, said in a statement. "We have worked decades to reduce fatalities in America... but this is a serious shot across the bow, a warning that as we drive more, our roads may not be as safe as we thought they were."

Anderson cites an improved economy with more cars, trucks and traffic on the roads as one explanation for the rise.

"Another likely contributing factor to these fatalities is the continued deterioration of highways and deferral of needed maintenance and improvements by federal and state governments," he said.

Data from the Federal Highway Administration showed vehicle miles traveled in the first six months of 2012 increased by 15.6 billion miles, a 1.1% increase from 2011.

Source: *CNN.com*: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/27/travel/2012-traffic-fatalities/index.html>