

Seven risk factors for traffic accidents

Last year, 43,220 people were killed and more than 3 million people were injured in motor vehicle accidents in the United States. Statisticians for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have compiled a list of seven risk factors which contribute to traffic accidents. Most of these factors can be avoided by controlling our behaviors. CTSI hopes that you will consider these factors when you drive.

1. Alcohol—Alcohol use is the biggest risk factor in auto accidents in the United States. Drivers who use alcohol are 4.4 times more likely to get in an accident than their sober counterparts. More than one third of all fatally injured drivers have some amount of alcohol in their systems.

2. Cell Phones—Using a cell phone while driving is the second biggest risk factor for accidents. The New England Journal of Medicine reported that the likelihood of having a collision while using a cell phone was 4.3 times higher than when not using a cell phone—nearly as great as driving under the influence of alcohol. Surprisingly, using a “hands free” phone does not reduce the risk. With either kind of phone, the driver concentrates on the telephone call, not driving.

3. Gender—The driver’s gender is the third biggest risk factor. Male drivers are 2.9 times more likely to be involved in fatal motor vehicle accidents than female drivers. This is partly due to the fact that men drive more miles than women. Men drive 63 percent of the total miles driven annually compared to 37 percent for women. Nonetheless, a 2002 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study found that 16 year-old boys were the road’s riskiest drivers.

4. Teenage Drivers—A teenage driver is 2.8 times more likely to be involved in a fatal vehicle crash than an adult driver. For every 100,000 drivers, 78 teenage drivers die in crashes compared to 33 drivers of all ages. Automobile accidents are the leading cause of teen deaths. The risk of crashes per mile driven among 16-19 year olds is four times higher than for older drivers.

5. Elderly Drivers—Per mile driven, older drivers have higher fatal crash rates than other adult drivers. Elderly drivers over age 75 are 2.1 times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes. Senior drivers may have difficulty negotiating complex traffic situations. Seniors are more likely to be ticketed for failing to yield, turning improperly and running stop signs and lights. Multiple vehicle accidents at intersections increase with age.

6. Speed—Drivers who speed are twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash. Speeding is involved in approximately one quarter of all accidents and one third of all fatal accidents. High speed reduces a driver’s ability to steer safely around curves or objects in the road. It also reduces the time available to react to a dangerous situation and increases the distance necessary to stop.

7. Location—Location is also a risk factor. Fatal crashes are 1.3 times more likely to occur in rural areas than in urban areas. In fact, 86 percent of all speeding-related fatalities in 1997 occurred on roads that were not interstate highways and 40 percent occurred on roads with speed limits under 55 miles per hour.

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