

Fewer fatalities

Despite more traffic, Oakland road deaths drop

Contrary to official predictions, Oakland County saw fewer traffic fatalities last year.

The Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County (TIA) reported 124 traffic fatalities in 1988 compared to 132 in 1987, a decrease of 6 percent. No town-by-town breakdown was available from Michigan State Police, who provided the statistics.

"Early last year, we were predicting that approximately 140 people would be killed in traffic," said

Bruce Madsen, TIA executive director.

LAST YEAR'S fatal accident figure, though an early one, is the second lowest in the 22 years that TIA has been maintaining countywide traffic statistics.

"The numbers of drivers, vehicles, and miles traveled in Oakland County have increased significantly in recent years," Madsen said.

"Add to that the fact of our healthy economic climate, and you

have a textbook condition for a worsening traffic toll."

Statewide, traffic fatalities rose 2 percent — from 1,532 in 1987 to 1,668 last year.

In 1983, a recession year, officials reported 117 traffic fatalities. During the late 1960s, traffic fatalities averaged about 180 per year.

In the '70s they numbered between 160 and 170. During the last five years there has been an annual average of 130 traffic fatalities.

"THE FACT that we experienced a reduction last year is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that traffic volumes in the county — the most accurate barometer of exposure — have increased by an estimated 90 percent in the last 20 years," Madsen said.

It will be a few weeks before details about last year's fatal accidents are available because some deaths due to 1988 accidents may not occur until 1989, and there are delays in reporting.

But TIA says it is generally accepted that safety belt use rate and the reduction in alcohol related fatalities among Oakland drivers are among the highest in the state.

Other reasons given by TIA for recent fatality decreases:

- Improved safety engineering of streets and highways.
- Better emergency and medical services.
- Improvements in vehicle safety design.

Oakland's highest traffic crash spots

Of the 10 highest accident spots in Oakland County, four are on M-59 in Waterford Township, the Traffic Improvement Association says. The four accounted for 373 accidents in 1987, the last full year for which data are available.

Troy and Rochester Hills, with their high concentrations of office and commercial space, are other high-accident areas.

But the fact that accidents are numerous doesn't mean those are the most dangerous, added Bob DeCorte, director of engineering and data services for TIA. One also must look at the number of fatalities, the volume of traffic, the areas where drinking occurs and "roadside furniture" such as trees and abutments.

That said, here is the list of high-accident spots, judged by the number

of accidents that occur within 200 feet of the intersection:

• M-59 in Waterford — 112 accidents at Airport Road (first), 93 at Pontiac Lake Road (third), 92 at Elizabeth Lake Road (fourth) and 76 at Williams Lake Road (fifth for ninth).

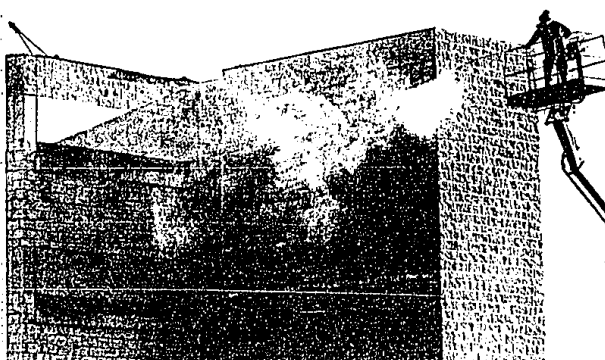
• Rochester Road in Troy — 96 accidents at Big Beaver (second), 76 at Wadsworth Road (eighth). Both are near an I-75 exit.

• Rochester Road in Rochester Hills — 89 at Hamlin Road (fifth), 81 at Auburn Road (fifth for ninth). Both are near an M-59 exit.

• Bloomfield Township — 86 Square Lake and Franklin roads (sixth).

• Farmington Hills — 83 at Twelve Mile and Orchard Lake roads (near an I-96 exit).

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DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Jail gets facial

A stair tower of the new Oakland County Jail addition got a recent steam cleaning from a workman. The jail is scheduled for opening

at the end of the month. The \$18 million addition will hold 488 prisoners.

State jobless rate dips to 10-year low for 1988

Seasonal changes in Michigan's labor market accounted for a 0.1 percent increase in the state's December unemployment to 7.5 percent.

Richard Simmons Jr., director of the Michigan Employment Security Commission, said the state's average unemployment rate for 1988 dropped by more than half a percentage point to a 10-year low of 7.5 percent.

Simmons said 1988 was a good year for the state's work force. It was the sixth straight year of decline for Michigan's average annual unemployment rate. The state's jobless rate peaked at 15.5 percent in 1982

and has steadily fallen since then.

In 1987, the rate averaged 8.2 percent. The current average rate is the lowest for any year since 1978's rate of 6.9 percent.

BOTH THE labor force and total employment reached record high averages in 1988, he added.

The number of workers in the state's labor force averaged 4,554,000, while the number with jobs averaged 4,208,000.

In December, the number of jobless workers was 345,000. A year earlier, December 1987, there were 392,000 out of work with a jobless

rate of 8.7 percent.

December saw scattered seasonal job gains and losses, Simmons said.

"THE RETAIL industry had normal holiday hiring increases, but these were offset by seasonal job losses in construction and education," he said.

For the final three months of 1988, Michigan's jobless rate averaged 7.3 percent.

Nationwide, December's seasonally adjusted jobless rate for the civilian labor force dropped a 0.1 percent to 5.3 percent, down from 5.4 percent in November.

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