

Survey Shows Drinking Drivers Caused Most Fatal Mishaps

Almost half of all drivers involved in Michigan's 2,234 fatal traffic accidents in 1986 had been drinking, and were driving too fast on two lane roads at night within 25 miles of home, in cars whose average age was 3.2 years with no mechanical defects and no seat belts, Automobile Club of Michigan's General Manager Fred N. Rehm revealed.

Driver failure was primary cause of 89 per cent of the deaths.

These facts emerge from a 61-page study, titled "How To Bring More Back Alive," which projects a representative 20 per cent sample of Michigan's 1986 deaths.

Triple A safety analysts visited scenes of 438 traffic deaths in July, August and over Memorial Day weekend and analyzed them plus driver's records and what drivers had been doing immediately prior to accidents.

Other facts the study reveals:

- The point system identifies bad drivers but does not protect the rest of society by taking them off the road. The 10 worst drivers involved in the 383 accidents studied had a lifetime average of 44 points each, 11 times more than the average drivers gets in his lifetime. They had an average of eight speeding or reckless driving convictions.

- Four per cent of the drivers involved had a total of 35 suspensions, with one suspended eight times. But nearly 20 per cent of drivers whose licenses are suspended or revoked get suspensions modified by appeal boards or the courts.

"Any driver who has over 12 points in any two-year period is headed for a serious accident," Rehm said. "His chances of being involved in a fatal accident are almost eight times greater than the average driver. Secretary of State figures show the average driver has four points and one accident in his lifetime."

"Our investigators, who are not auto engineers, could find no evidence that vehicle defects played a significant role as accident causes," Rehm said.

Camp Fire Girls Plan Mall Party

Camp Fire Girls from Waukegan District will hold their 57th Birthday celebration at the Livonia Mall on Saturday, April 4, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The theme for this year's celebration is based on the National Camp Fire Girls annual project "Spot-Light the Creative Arts."

Working Group displays depicting Camp Fire Girls program levels (Blue Birds thru Horizon Club) will turn the Livonia Mall ablaze with activity, ranging from Indian dancing, clay molding to science exhibits and group singing.

Robert Chatham of the Mall and Seymour Goldberg, of Crowley's, are working closely with the groups and loaders to insure a lively display.

A feature of the celebration will be 12" by 18" pictures through Horizon Club girls have done using a variety of mediums. Judging of these works of art will be at 3:30 p.m.

Following the Birthday Celebration these pictures will be donated to the following institutions to brighten up their walls: Plymouth State Hospital, Presbyterian Village, Mt. Carmel Hospital, Providence Hospital and Providence Convalescent Home.

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While the number of motorized cycles and bikes on Michigan roads is increasing at an unprecedented rate, the number of accidents and fatalities involving these vehicles is going up nearly 50 per cent faster.

The vast majority of cycle drivers who died were under age 25. Average age was under 21, ranging from 14 to 31.

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Even in Michigan's peak tourist months, the area within 25 miles of home is by far the most dangerous. Eighty-two per cent of the drivers involved were within 25 miles of home, not on vacation. Only two per cent were on vacation and more than 25 miles from home.

Some basic law violation was involved in 89 per cent of fatalities, with speed too fast for conditions most common. Others including driving to left of center, failure to yield right of way, running traffic signals, disregarding stop signs and improper turns.

Many motorists misunderstand Michigan's basic "what ever is safe and proper" speed law, for many apparently presumed incorrectly that they could safely go the statewide limit of 65 day time, 55 at night, on any unposted two-lane county road.

Nearly 70 per cent of the fatalities occurred on two-lane roads. 41 per cent of them at speeds too fast for conditions. Only 4,000 of 24,000 miles of two-lane county roads have been studied scientifically to determine their speed capabilities.

The speed problem is indicated by the fact that while total accidents decreased by 2.7 per cent in 1986, deaths increased 7 per cent and injuries increased 3.5 per cent. "We feel this is due to high speeds on two-lane roads," Rehm said.

Large single accident type was single-car ran off road accidents (34 per cent) followed by two-car collisions (31 per cent).

An even 20 per cent of fatal accidents were between 16 and 20. Nearly 16 per cent were between 18 and 19—far out of proportion to the 8.9 per cent of drivers it is estimated they represent. In addition, 59 per cent of teenagers involved in fatalities had been drinking.

Most dangerous hour was 6 p.m. with 10 per cent of the accidents. Next was 1 a.m. with nine per cent, followed by 2 a.m. with 7 per cent. Sunday was most dangerous day, followed by Saturday, Friday and Monday. Presumably these days experienced highest traffic volumes also.

At least half of the accident reports examined were incomplete to some degree. Many lacked any information on drinking condition of the drivers.

One out of 17 of the accidents involved motorized bikes or cycles, while they represent only one out of every 65 vehicles on Michigan roads.

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Almost all occurred on weekends.

"Driver failure, due to bad habits, and attitudes, alcohol, ignorance, poor judgment, inexperience or a combination of these, underlies most fatal accidents," Rehm said. "The disproportionately large number of high point drivers involved is evidence of the role of habits and attitudes."

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"Speed too fast" for conditions, combined with the large number of single-car accidents, the extremely high percentage of fatalities on two-lane roads and the large number of teenage drivers, indicate poor judgment, ignorance of the basic speed law, driver fatigue, inattention, bad habits and attitudes and/or alcohol," Rehm said.

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