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US pedestrian fatalities rising faster than ever before, study says

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 08, 2016

The number of pedestrians killed in traffic crashes in the United States last year jumped by an estimated 10 percent, the largest year-to-year increase since the statistics started being tracked four decades ago, according to a new report.

The annual study from the Governors Highway Safety Association based its finding on preliminary data on pedestrian fatalities recorded by highway agencies nationwide during the first six months of 2015.

Altogether, preliminary data show that 2,368 people who were on foot were killed in traffic crashes between January and June of 2015, up from 2,232 who were killed in the same months of 2014.

That's only about a 6 percent increase, but researchers said that because of underreporting that is common in preliminary data, they expect the actual change to be a 10 percent rise.

"We are projecting the largest year-to-year increase in pedestrian fatalities since national records have been kept, and therefore we are quite alarmed," said Richard Retting of Sam Schwartz

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Consulting, who co-authored the report for the association with his colleague Heather Rothenberg.

“Pedestrian safety is clearly a growing problem across the country,” he added in a statement. “It is important to understand the data underlying these crashes so states and localities can apply the right mix of engineering, education and enforcement to counteract this troubling trend.”

The association said that since records began being kept in 1975, the year-to-year change in the number of pedestrian fatalities has varied from a 10.5 percent decrease to an 8.1 percent increase.

Pedestrians now account for about 15 percent of all motor vehicle crash-related deaths, up from 11 percent a decade ago, the association said.

The association said factors contributing to the spike in pedestrian deaths include:

- An increase in motor vehicle travel, fueled in part by improved economic conditions and lower gas prices.
- The growing use of cellphones, which are distracting both walkers and drivers.
- Though vehicles have become increasingly safer for the people inside them, pedestrians remain just as susceptible to injuries when hit by a motor vehicle.
- An increase in the number of Americans walking for health, economic, or environmental reasons.

The study noted that most pedestrian fatalities — 72 percent of the ones in 2014 — happened when it was dark outside. Seventy-four percent happened at non-intersection locations.

Alcohol can also play a role: Pedestrians had elevated blood alcohol levels in 34 percent of cases in 2013, while drivers had elevated blood alcohol levels in 15 percent of cases.

A state-by-state breakdown of pedestrian fatalities during the first half of 2015 shows varying results. While 26 states and Washington D.C. reported increases compared with the first half of

2014, 21 states saw decreases, and three had no change.

In Massachusetts, there were 34 pedestrian fatalities reported in the first six months of 2015, up from 27 during the same period the previous year.

Adjusting for population, the states with the highest pedestrian fatality rates during the first half of 2015 were: Florida with a rate of 1.35 pedestrian fatalities per 100,000 residents, followed by Arizona and Delaware (1.27 each), South Carolina (1.12), and Mississippi (1.07).

Massachusetts' rate was 0.5 fatalities per 100,000 residents, which ranked it the 19th lowest and was below the national rate of 0.74.

Along with collecting data, the association said, it has compiled a list of promising approaches taken by states to try to reduce collisions involving pedestrians.

Pedestrian traffic deaths by state

State	Jan.-June 2014	Jan.-June 2015 (preliminary)	Change	% Change	2015 fatality rate per 100,000 population
Alabama	39	41	2	5%	0.84
Alaska	6	3	-3	-50%	0.41
Arizona	78	87	9	12%	1.27
Arkansas	16	10	-6	-38%	0.34
California	323	347	24	7%	0.89
Colorado	23	30	7	30%	0.55
Connecticut	16	15	-1	-6%	0.42
Delaware	9	12	3	33%	1.27
Washington D.C.	5	7	2	40%	1.04
Florida	284	273	-11	-4%	1.35
Georgia	86	79	-7	-8%	0.77
Hawaii	17	13	-4	-24%	0.91
Idaho	7	2	-5	-71%	0.12
Illinois	55	68	13	24%	0.53

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Indiana	47	50	3	6%	0.76
Iowa	10	8	-2	-20%	0.26
Kansas	12	6	-6	-50%	0.21
Kentucky	30	36	6	20%	0.81
Louisiana	49	46	-3	-6%	0.98
Maine	5	5	0	0%	0.38
Maryland	46	40	-6	-13%	0.67
Massachusetts	27	34	7	26%	0.5
Michigan	66	60	-6	-9%	0.6
Minnesota	7	14	7	100%	0.26
Mississippi	30	32	2	7%	1.07
Missouri	24	43	19	79%	0.71
Montana	3	6	3	100%	0.58
Nebraska	5	9	4	80%	0.47
Nevada	20	24	4	20%	0.83
New Hampshire	9	2	-7	-78%	0.15
New Jersey	73	76	3	4%	0.85
New Mexico	31	21	-10	-32%	1.01
New York	106	129	23	22%	0.65
North Carolina	76	74	-2	-3%	0.74
North Dakota	4	1	-3	-75%	0.13
Ohio	25	56	31	124%	0.48
Oklahoma	22	32	10	45%	0.82
Oregon	21	42	21	100%	1.04
Pennsylvania	73	59	-14	-19%	0.46
Rhode Island	6	2	-4	-67%	0.19
South Carolina	42	55	13	31%	1.12
South Dakota	4	1	-3	-75%	0.12
Tennessee	47	46	-1	-2%	0.7

Texas	232	235	3	1%	0.86
Utah	21	21	0	0%	0.7
Vermont	2	0	-2	-100%	0
Virginia	35	38	3	9%	0.45
Washington	32	41	9	28%	0.57
West Virginia	7	11	4	57%	0.6
Wisconsin	15	22	7	47%	0.38
Wyoming	4	4	0	0%	0.68
TOTAL	2,232	2,368	136	Average +6%	0.74

SOURCE: Governors Highway Safety Association

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