



# Pedestrian deaths in US surge as drivers, walkers distracted by phones

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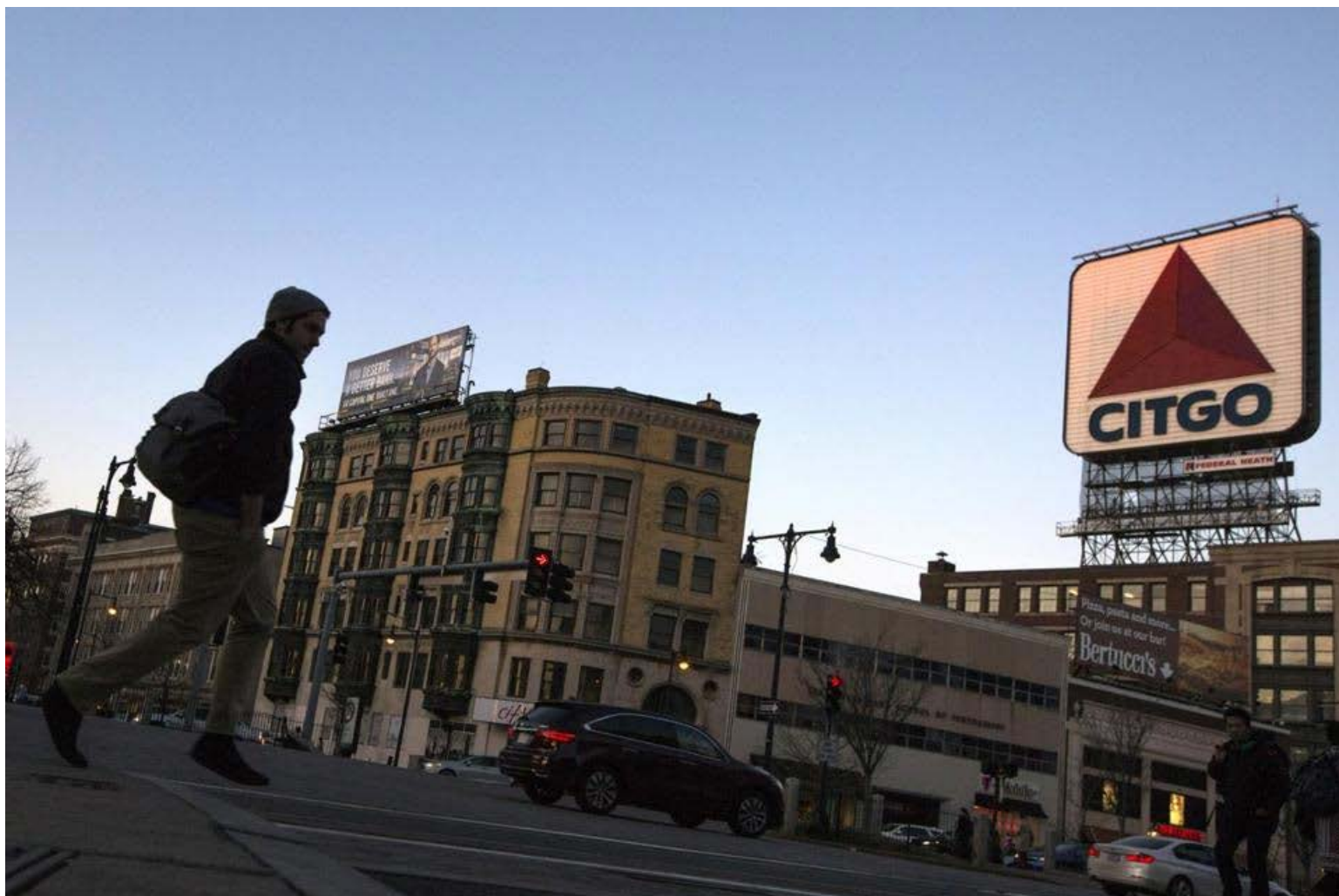
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**Pedestrians walked through Kenmore Square in February.**

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 30, 2017

The number of pedestrians killed on US roadways last year is estimated to have spiked by about 11

percent, including a slight increase in Massachusetts, according to a new projections.

The [report](#) blamed the trend on an improving economy that has led to drivers logging more miles in recent years and people distracted by phones while driving and walking.

Massachusetts highway safety director Jeff Larason agreed that distraction has become a serious problem and something state officials have taken steps to address, including through traffic enforcement and public awareness campaigns.

“People when they are distracted, there’s a period of time when they look back up onto the road, the situational awareness isn’t there immediately, and it takes time for people to recover and pedestrians and cyclists tend to be the last thing they see,” Larason said. “And pedestrians are not paying as much attention.”



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The Governors Highway Safety Association, in a report released Thursday, estimated that there were about 6,000 pedestrian fatalities nationwide in 2016, up from nearly 5,400 in 2015 and up from a recent low-point, 2009, when there were about 4,100 such deaths.

The association said the 2015 to 2016 jump was the steepest year-to-year increase since recordkeeping began about four decades ago, and that pedestrian deaths have risen at a faster rate in recent years than traffic deaths overall.

“This is the second year in a row that we have seen unprecedented increases in pedestrian fatalities, which is both sad and alarming,” the report’s author, Richard Retting, of Sam Schwartz Transportation Consultants, said in a statement.

“It is critical that the highway safety community understand these disturbing statistics and work to aggressively implement effective countermeasures,” he added.

The projected total for 2016 was based on preliminary data collected by the highway safety offices in each state and Washington, D.C., about the number pedestrian fatalities during the first six months of that year. The association said it also considered historical trends in projecting the total number of deaths nationwide for 2016.

The data showed that during the first half of 2016 there were 38 pedestrian fatalities in Massachusetts, up from 35 in the same stretch of 2015.

Elsewhere in New England: there were 28 pedestrian deaths in the first half of 2016 in Connecticut, up from 21 in the same stretch of the previous year; New Hampshire had eight, up from two; Rhode Island had seven, up from two; Vermont had four, up from zero; and Maine had five, the same total it saw in the first half of 2015, the report said.

Even with the slight increase, Massachusetts still sees relatively few pedestrian deaths per resident when compared with other states.

There were 0.56 pedestrian deaths per 100,000 residents statewide during the first six months of 2016, which ranked as the 14th lowest rate nationally.

The association in a press release said there “are many possible factors contributing” to the national spike in pedestrian deaths.

“As economic conditions improve and gas prices remain low, the U.S. has seen an increase in motor vehicle miles traveled,” the association said. “At the same time, a growing number of Americans are choosing to travel by foot for health, transportation, economic or environmental reasons.”

“Another potential factor is a sharp rise in the use of smartphones to send and receive multimedia



messages, a frequent source of mental and visual distraction for both walkers and drivers,” it added.

The rise in pedestrian deaths comes as the country as a whole — and Massachusetts specifically — has seen a [rise in traffic fatalities overall](#).

The increase in deaths from motor vehicle crashes has also been blamed in part on improving economic conditions that lead to people logging more miles and to distracted driving.

The report said that while traffic deaths overall increased by about 6 percent between 2010 and 2015, pedestrian fatalities increased by about 25 percent during those years.

## Pedestrian traffic deaths, by state

Data for the first six months of each year. Figures for 2016 are considered preliminary data.

State	2015	2016	Change	% Change
Alabama	39	56	17	43.6%
Alaska	3	6	3	100.0%
Arizona	86	97	11	12.8%
Arkansas	15	21	6	40.0%
California	405	359	(46)	-11.4%
Colorado	30	32	2	6.7%
Connecticut	21	28	7	33.3%
Delaware	9	18	9	100.0%
DC	7	3	(4)	-57.1%
Florida	277	301	24	8.7%
Georgia	90	109	19	21.1%
Hawaii	11	15	4	36.4%
Idaho	2	7	5	250.0%
Illinois	81	70	(11)	-13.6%
Indiana	49	41	(8)	-16.3%
Iowa	8	11	3	37.5%
Kansas	11	17	6	54.5%
Kentucky	36	37	1	2.8%
Louisiana	48	53	5	10.4%

Maine	5	5	-	0.0%
Maryland	45	39	(6)	-13.3%
Massachusetts	35	38	3	8.6%
Michigan	62	59	(3)	-4.8%
Minnesota	14	23	9	64.3%
Mississippi	33	22	(11)	-33.3%
Missouri	43	36	(7)	-16.3%
Montana	6	8	2	33.3%
Nebraska	9	7	(2)	-22.2%
Nevada	25	31	6	24.0%
New Hampshire	2	8	6	300.0%
New Jersey	77	71	(6)	-7.8%
New Mexico	21	26	5	23.8%
New York	137	127	(10)	-7.3%
North Carolina	77	96	19	24.7%
North Dakota	1	2	1	100.0%
Ohio	54	55	1	1.9%
Oklahoma	32	35	3	9.4%
Oregon	42	29	(13)	-31.0%
Pennsylvania	59	77	18	30.5%
Rhode Island	2	7	5	250.0%
South Carolina	57	66	9	15.8%
South Dakota	1	2	1	100.0%
Tennessee	43	46	3	7.0%
Texas	242	322	80	33.1%
Utah	21	19	(2)	-9.5%
Vermont	-	4	4	-
Virginia	37	50	13	35.1%
Washington	40	36	(4)	-10.0%
West Virginia	11	1	(1)	-9.1%
Wisconsin	21	22	1	4.8%
Wyoming	4	1	(3)	-75.0%
US	2,486	2,660	174	7.0%

SOURCE: **Governors Highway Safety Association**

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [matthew.rocheleau@globe.com](mailto:matthew.rocheleau@globe.com). Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele)

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