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Mass. traffic deaths up 46 percent since 2013

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By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 15, 2017

In the latest evidence of the grim toll caused by distracted driving and other factors, new statistics

show that deaths from motor vehicle crashes in Massachusetts during the first half of this year were about 21 percent higher than two years ago and about 46 percent higher than 2013.

The news wasn't all bad: The number of deaths was virtually identical to the same period last year, according to projections released Tuesday by the National Safety Council, a nonprofit created by Congress to promote safety.

Still, the council said, "The country is fresh off the steepest estimated two-year increase in motor vehicle deaths since 1964, and it is too early to conclude that the upward trend is over."

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Experts believe an improving economy and lower gas prices have contributed to the increase in deaths, both in Massachusetts and nationally, because those factors lead to more traffic, as more people commute to work and can afford to drive farther and take vacations.

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Another factor believed to be fueling the deadly trend: [more people driving while using cellphones and other devices.](#)

"The big issue is what we've been talking about for the past couple of years: People are using their

devices and not paying attention to the roads like we need them to be,” said Jeff Larason, the state’s highway safety director.

Larason spoke by phone Monday afternoon while looking out the window of the Transportation Building in downtown Boston. As he watched cars roll by, he said he spotted one driver after another looking at their phones. It’s not just drivers, either.

“I’m looking at Stuart Street and there’s a guy skateboarding eating pizza with one hand and has his phone in the other hand,” he said.

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“The electronic devices we have with us are a distraction in every single facet of our life,” said Larason. “Where it becomes a life-or-death situation is when we’re using it in our cars and around traffic.”

A total of 180 people statewide were killed in vehicle crashes during the first six months of 2017, according to the National Safety Council. That was about the same as the preliminary estimate of 179 killed in the first half of 2016, but significantly higher than in previous years.

In [2015](#), the preliminary estimate for the same period was 149; in 2013 it was 123.

The picture was similar nationally.

Motor vehicle crashes in the United States claimed 18,680 lives during the first half of this year, similar to the 18,930 killed during the first six months of 2016. The council noted that the last half of the year tends to be deadlier than the first half.

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The 2017 figure was higher by about 8 percent than the first half of 2015 and about 12 percent higher than first half of 2013.

Massachusetts has run public-awareness campaigns to urge people not to travel on roads while distracted. But it's an uphill battle.

“Technology is advancing, so it’s a little bit like trying to fight back the tide,” Larason said.

Driving deaths by state

Figures are considered to be preliminary estimates.

State	2017	2016	2015	2016 to 2017 % change	2015 to 2017 % change
TOTAL U.S.	18,680	18,930	17,259	-1%	8%
Alabama	471	479	381	-2%	24%
Alaska	33	34	27	-3%	22%
Arizona	469	473	451	-1%	4%
Arkansas	240	263	237	-9%	1%
California	1,492	1,702	1,566	-12%	-5%
Colorado	265	254	236	4%	12%
Connecticut	148	138	95	7%	56%
Delaware	42	60	47	-30%	-11%
Dist. of Columbia	16	9	10	78%	60%
Florida	1,570	1,590	1,441	-1%	9%

Georgia	735	701	657	5%	12%
Hawaii	53	48	52	10%	2%
Idaho	103	115	84	-10%	23%
Illinois	516	494	442	4%	17%
Indiana	429	383	356	12%	21%
Iowa	142	182	134	-22%	6%
Kansas	216	195	149	11%	45%
Kentucky	353	373	326	-5%	8%
Louisiana	413	314	330	32%	25%
Maine	64	63	62	2%	3%
Maryland	242	231	224	5%	8%
Massachusetts	180	179	149	1%	21%
Michigan	491	462	409	6%	20%
Minnesota	162	173	187	-6%	-13%
Mississippi	319	326	288	-2%	11%
Missouri	422	410	383	3%	10%
Montana	77	77	72	0%	7%
Nebraska	100	100	109	0%	-8%
Nevada	147	141	147	4%	0%
New Hampshire	53	61	38	-13%	39%
New Jersey	269	272	245	-1%	10%
New Mexico	172	187	131	-8%	31%
New York	403	411	430	-2%	-6%
North Carolina	671	668	634	0%	6%
North Dakota	52	45	61	16%	-15%
Ohio	511	505	499	1%	2%
Oklahoma	281	322	303	-13%	-7%
Oregon	185	217	204	-15%	-9%
Pennsylvania	539	569	552	-5%	-2%
Rhode Island	39	23	21	70%	86%
South Carolina	492	458	445	7%	11%
South Dakota	32	44	44	-27%	-27%
Tennessee	486	502	437	-3%	11%
Texas	1,733	1,824	1,643	-5%	5%

Utah	122	133	129	-8%	-5%
Vermont	26	31	19	-16%	37%
Virginia	377	348	344	8%	10%
Washington	237	253	235	-6%	1%
West Virginia	124	109	119	14%	4%
Wisconsin	272	277	254	-2%	7%
Wyoming	67	42	66	60%	2%

SOURCE: National Safety Council

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