



## Report: Older drivers involved in high share of deadly crashes

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JUNEAU EMPIRE

A Washington D.C. national transportation research group released a report Wednesday examining driver safety and fatality rates of older motorists.

The report, called "Keeping Baby Boomers Mobile: Preserving the Mobility and Safety of Older Americans," found the total number of traffic fatalities has declined in recent years, but that older motorists are involved in a disproportionately high share of deadly crashes.

In 2010, there were 5,750 fatalities in crashes nationwide involving at least one driver 65 or older, according to the report. Of those, 3,398 drivers 65 or older were killed.

"Although drivers 65 and older account for eight percent of all miles driven in the nation, 17 percent of all traffic fatalities occurred in crashes where at least one driver was 65 or older," the report states.

Florida, which has more than 2.5 million licensed drivers in that age group, led in the nation in 2010 with the highest number of fatalities where a crash involved at least one driver 65 or older — 503. Texas (397), California (390), Pennsylvania (265), North Carolina (232), Georgia (228), New York (217), Ohio (211), Michigan (187) and Tennessee (184) were next in line.

Florida also lead the nation with the highest number of drivers age 65 or older killed in a traffic crash, 271.

Comparatively, the report indicates that Alaska had one of the lowest numbers of fatalities where a crash involved at least one driver 65 or older — 10. Of those, five Alaskan drivers 65 or older were killed, the report states.

The top 10 states with the highest percentage of drivers 65 and older are Connecticut (20 percent), West Virginia (20 percent), Florida (18 percent), Pennsylvania (18 percent), South Dakota (18 percent), Arkansas (18 percent), Alabama (18 percent), Oklahoma (18 percent), Maine (18 percent) and New York (18 percent). The top 10 states with the greatest total number of licensed drivers older than 65 are California (3.1 million), Florida (2.7 million), Texas (2 million), New York (1.9 million), Pennsylvania (1.5 million), Ohio (1.3 million), Illinois (1.2 million), Michigan (1.1 million), North Carolina (1 million) and New Jersey (1 million).

Alaska has about 50,000 licensed drivers 65 years or older, which is 10 percent of all drivers in Alaska, according to both the report and state of Alaska Division of Motor Vehicles statistics.

The report was produced by a nonprofit called TRIP, which researches and evaluates economic and technical data on transportation issues, according to its website.

The report highlights ways in which state departments of transportation are actively addressing the needs of Baby Boomers — who started turning 65 last year — on the road.

"One example is the Florida Department of Transportation which — since the early 90's (sic) has emphasized the need to enhance its surface transportation system to better accommodate older drivers," the report states. "These improvements have included the widening of roadway striping from four to six inches, the use of advanced street name and guide signs with larger lettering, larger stop and yield signs, and the use of countdown pedestrian signs."

The report also makes recommendations for older motorists to monitor their own driving abilities, such as taking driving classes offered by AAA and AARP. It also identifies roadway hazards for older drivers. For instance, the report cites National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data that shows in 2010, 37 percent of all fatal crashes in that age group occurred at an intersection or were related to an intersection. For fatal crashes where no driver was 65 or older, 20 percent were at an intersection.

According to Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Encyclopedia, which is a national database that compiles National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data, there were 30,797 fatal crashes nationwide. The FARS website indicates that there were a total of 52 occupants killed in motor vehicle crashes in Alaska in 2009, which is the latest data available. Twenty-five occupants killed were in Anchorage and three were in Juneau.

Those number are in line with statistics provided by the state's Alaska Highway Safety Office, though there are discrepancies probably because the reporting criteria and deadlines differ for different agencies.

The Safety Office says there were 75 drivers of all ages involved in fatal crashes in Alaska in 2010. Of those 75 drivers, 16 were in the age group 45-54; 14, 55-64; 12, 35-44; 11, 25-34; eight, 65 or older; seven, 21-24; two, 18 years old; two, 19 years old; 1, 20 years old; and 1, 17 years old.

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