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Study finds higher fatality rate among older drivers



By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A national study released today says older drivers are involved in a disproportionately high percentage of fatal crashes.

Drivers 65 and older account for 8 percent of all miles driven but 17 percent of traffic fatalities came in crashes where at least one driver was 65 or older. That news came from a report issued by TRIP, a nonprofit research organization sponsored by insurance companies, highway and construction interests and labor unions.

Pennsylvania had the fourth-highest number of fatalities in crashes involving older drivers in 2010, with 265. Florida was at the top with 503 fatalities. Pennsylvania's 1.6 million older drivers make up 18 percent of the state's driving population, also fourth-highest in the U.S.

One in five fatal crashes in the state involved older drivers, 12th-highest percentage in the nation and three percentage points above the national average, the report said.

Among its recommendations are clearer, brighter and simpler signage with bigger lettering; brighter street lighting and pavement markings, training and evaluation programs for older drivers and expanded public transit.

The percentage of drivers 65 and older is expected to grow from the current 16 percent to 20 percent by 2025, the report said.

"Although overall traffic fatality rates have fallen to record lows in recent years, older drivers still make up a disproportionately high share of those involved in fatal traffic crashes. Roadway safety improvements designed to make it easier for older drivers to navigate traffic are becoming increasingly important, as the largest generation in American history grapples with the effects of aging while trying to maintain a level of mobility that matches its active lifestyle," it said.

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