

Older drivers involved in more traffic accidents

Pennsylvania ranks high in crashes involving motorists age 65 or older.

By Dan Hartzell, Of The Morning Call

Drivers aged 65 or older are involved in a disproportionately high number of U.S. traffic accidents and related fatalities, according to a new study. The findings are of particular concern in Pennsylvania and other states with many older drivers.

Pennsylvania ranked fourth in fatalities resulting from crashes involving at least one driver 65 or older during 2010, and sixth in the number of older drivers killed in all traffic accidents, according to the study by TRIP (The Road Information Program), a nonprofit transportation research group, and by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

The state ranks fifth in the number of licensed drivers over 65 (nearly 2 million), and fourth in the percentage of licensed drivers over 65.

Pennsylvania was the fourth-deadliest state in terms of 2010 crashes involving at least one driver age 65 and older, with 265 lives lost. Florida topped the list with 503 deaths; California, with the most older drivers at 3.15 million, was third at 390, and Texas second at 397 deaths.

The proportion of older drivers is expected to grow as baby boomers enter the category in droves, according to projections. With older Americans living longer and remaining active longer, the older-driver segment is expected to rise from 13 percent of the driving population today to 20 percent, or one in five motorists, by 2025, the study says.

To help improve the deadly statistics, TRIP and AASHTO make recommendations to promote safer drivers in this age group, as well as safer roads and safer vehicles as they apply to older drivers.

The proposals include education and training for older drivers, and evaluating and testing older drivers who show signs of being "at risk" motorists through appropriate licensing standards; clearer, brighter, simpler road signs with larger lettering and graphics, brighter street markings, more left-turn lanes at intersections, longer entry and exit ramps and more rumble strips; and more public-transit routes with better accessibility.

The study sponsors and other highway-safety advocates also use the report to urge state and federal legislators to accelerate their efforts to provide more money for safer roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure.

"The TRIP report demonstrates a need to commit to a robust investment in Pennsylvania's highway infrastructure" at all levels of government, Jason Wagner of Pennsylvania Highway Information Association, said in a statement.

TRIP spokesman Frank Moretti said the organization doesn't advocate for specific fund-raising options, but rather, officials hope their research will generate public pressure that in turn prompts legislators to act.

"We think there's a threshold where the public understands the importance of these issues," Moretti said. Though transportation-infrastructure improvements cost significant amounts of money, "our reports point out [that] there's a cost in not resolving" roadway-safety issues.

Pennsylvania Transportation Department spokesman Steve Chizmar said the state actively has promoted older-driver safety initiatives for many years, and continues to do so. He said programs and resources are available at <http://www.dmv.state.us.maturedrivers>.

States with the most elderly fatalities

Top 10 states with 2010 traffic fatalities in crashes involving at least one 65+ driver:

Florida 503
Texas 397
California 390
Pennsylvania 265
North Carolina 232
Georgia 228
New York 217
Ohio 211
Michigan 187
Tennessee 184

Source: TRIP (The Road Information Program) and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials