



For Immediate Release

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Contact

Mark McKechnie
Washington Traffic Safety
Commission
(360) 725.9889
mmckechnie@wtsc.wa.gov

Washington Traffic Deaths Reach 33-Year High

Washington experienced 810 traffic deaths in 2023 according to preliminary data collected by the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC).¹ This represents a 10% increase since 2022, and it is the largest number of traffic deaths in Washington since 1990.

“810 is not just a shocking statistic. Every number represents a life lost. A lost family member. A lost co-worker. A lost friend. The people who mourn have had their lives changed forever,” said Shelly Baldwin, Director of the Washington Traffic Safety Commission. “I hold them in my heart as I ask drivers to take the actions we know save lives. Drive sober. Be patient. Stay focused. Buckle up.”

Fatality numbers increased across several categories. More pedestrians (157 people) and motorcyclists (141 people) were killed in Washington last year than in any other year on record.

High-risk behaviors continue to lead to increased deaths on Washington roads. These are the preliminary 2023 numbers and percentage change from 2022:

- 400 fatalities involved a drug- or alcohol-impaired driver (+4%). This is likely to increase as more toxicology results become available.
- 251 fatalities involved excessive speed (-1%).
- 171 fatalities involved an unrestrained vehicle occupant (+10%).
- 135 fatalities involved a distracted driver (+36%).

The large increase in distraction-related fatalities reverses a downward trend that began in 2018 with the passage of Washington’s eDUI law.

“We cannot continue to watch increasingly erratic driver behavior cause more crashes, deaths and injuries,” said Washington Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar. “We’re taking a [Safe System](#) approach to address this safety crisis, such as adding speed safety cameras to our work zones,

¹ This number remains preliminary and may still increase. WTSC will release more detailed 2023 data during an update to our data dashboards in May 2024. Link: [Data Dashboards - Washington Traffic Safety Commission](#).

incorporating Complete Streets into all of our programs and investing in active and public transportation – including creating more space and separation for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and bicyclists. We’ve also proposed investments in safety on state highways running through population centers, where fatal crashes are more than double the state average. All of these initiatives to reduce crash rates take time to implement. A change in driver behavior would make a difference immediately.”

Impairment, speed, distraction, and lack of seatbelt use are involved in more than 75 percent of all traffic fatalities in Washington.

“This trend is not just alarming – it’s unacceptable,” said WSP Chief John R. Batiste. “Driving sober, obeying the speed limit, avoiding distractions, and buckling up – these are all the safe choices – the right choices – that need to be made on our roadways. The cost of choosing otherwise can result in the loss of a life – a cost that is just too high.”

“Serious crashes are not accidents,” said Baldwin. “We know what causes them and what can prevent them. The single most important safety feature of any vehicle is the driver.”

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