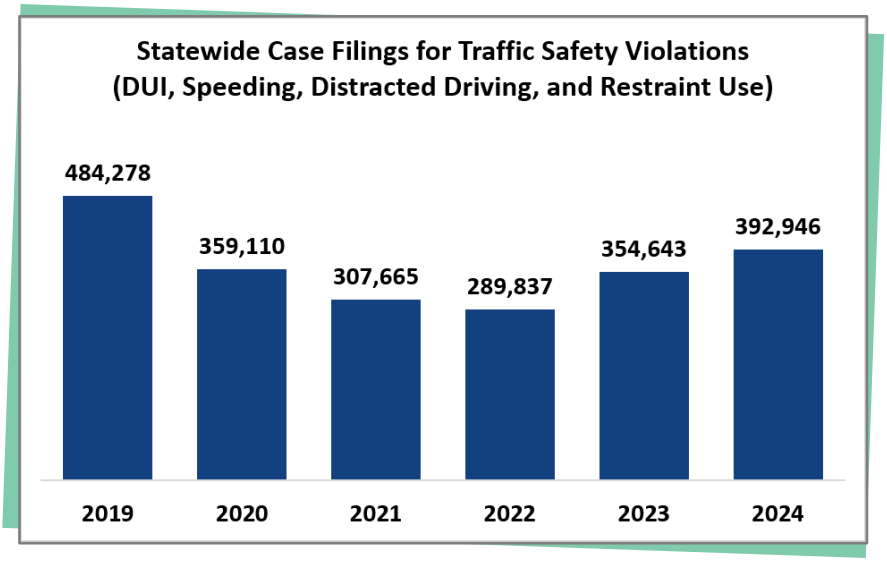
Traffic Safety Enforcement Case Filings

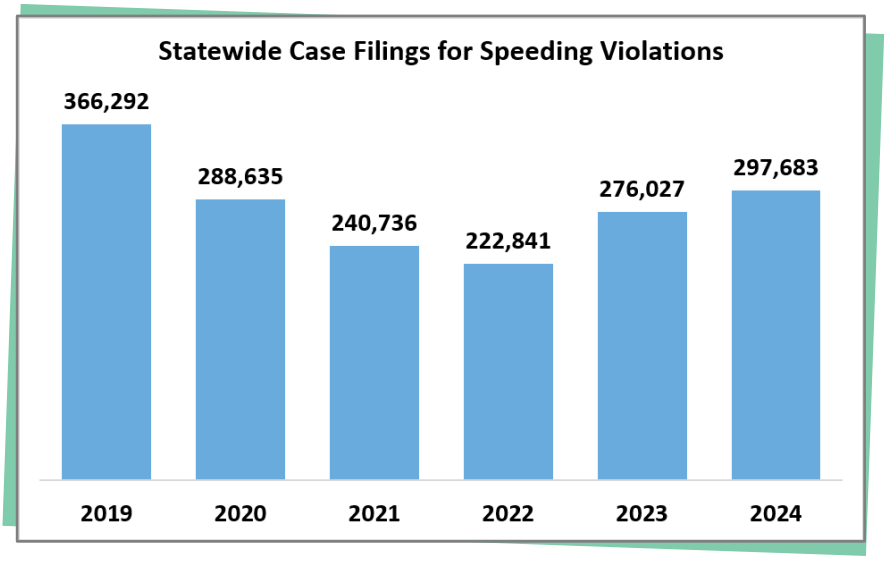
Traffic citations issued by law enforcement are filed with the Washington courts for resolution. The most common traffic safety-related case filings include those filed under:

- RCW 46.61.400 (Speeding)
- RCW 46.61.502 and 46.61.504 (Impaired Driving)
- RCW 46.61.672 and 46.61.673 (Distracted Driving)
- RCW 46.61.687 and 46.61.688 (Restraint Use)

Case filings for traffic safety violations declined drastically in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to decline through 2022[1]. Since 2023, traffic safety violation case filings have been increasing but remain lower than pre-COVID-19 levels. The lowest number of case filings occurred in 2022, a 40 percent decrease from the number of case filings in 2019. In 2023, case filings increased 22 percent and increased another 11 percent in 2024.



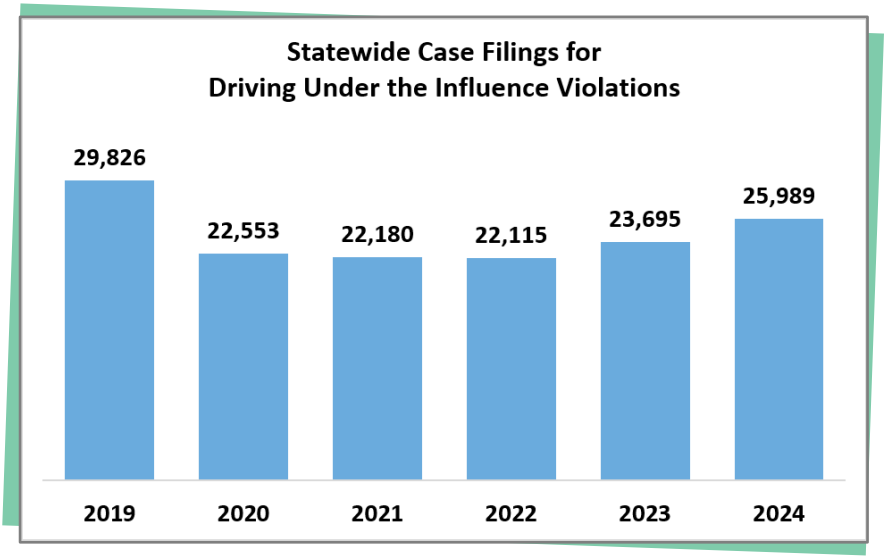
I care, because proactive enforcement of traffic safety laws is a proven strategy to lower and prevent traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Three-fourths of all traffic fatalities involved impairment, distraction, speeding, or unrestrained vehicle occupants[2]. Many involved a combination of these high-risk behaviors.

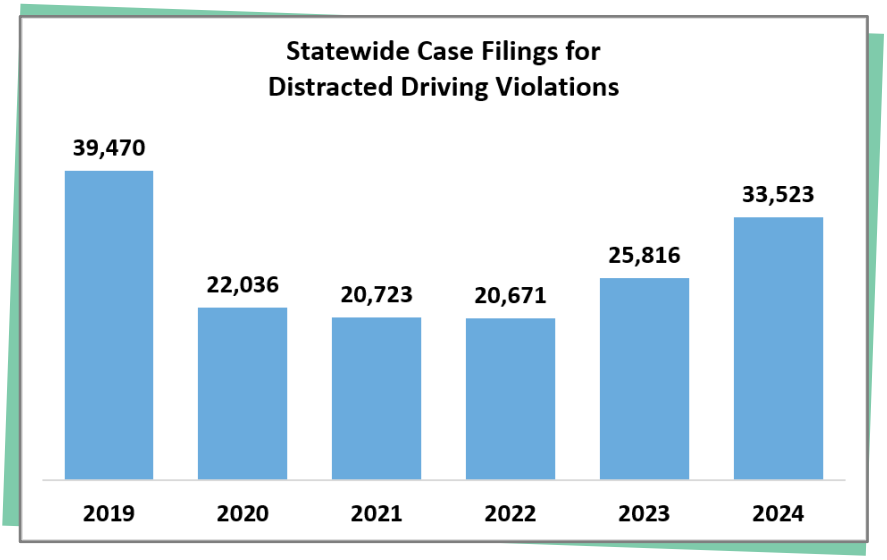


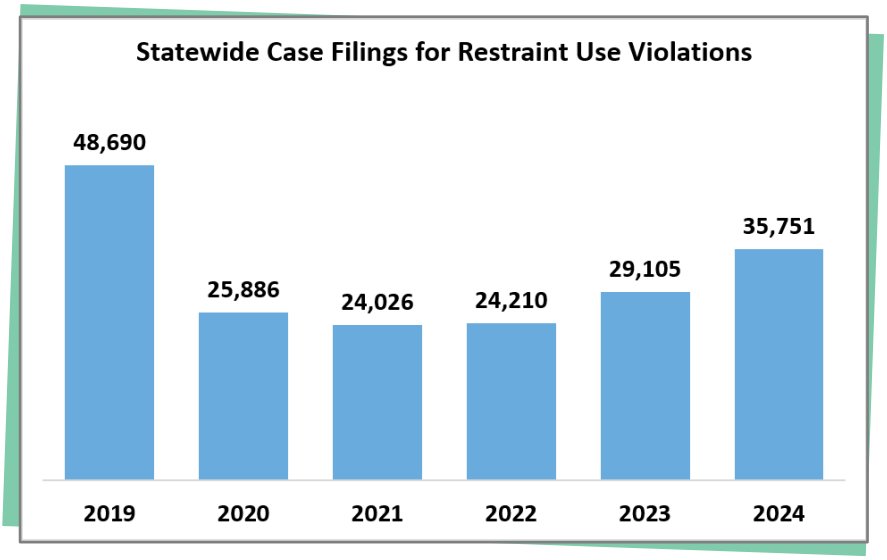
Speeding is far too common on Washington roadways and is the most cited traffic safety violation. Thirteen percent of Washington drivers admit to regularly traveling 10 miles per hour or more over the posted speed limit despite three-fourths of drivers believing speeders are likely to be caught by law enforcement[3]. The majority of Washingtonians support speeding enforcement.

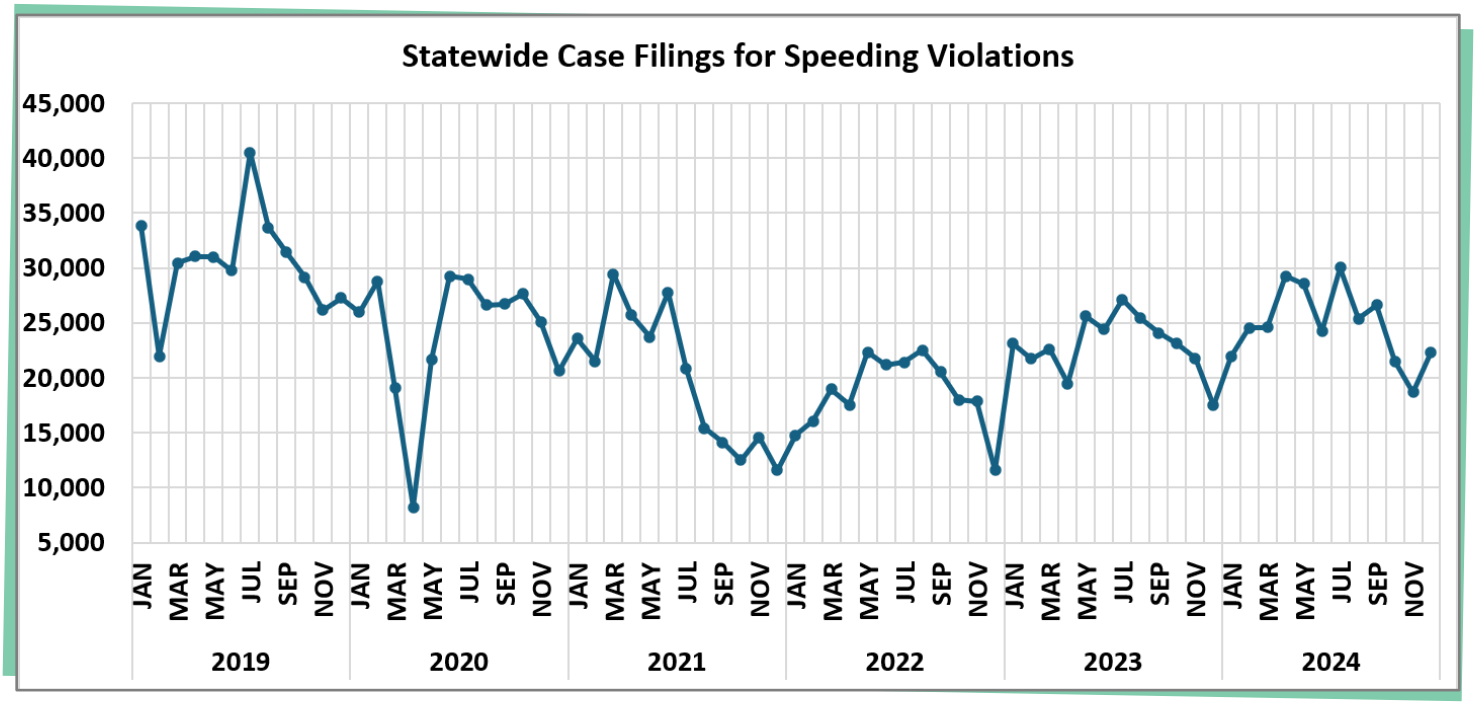
Impairment by drugs or alcohol is the most common factor in fatal crashes and is involved in more than half of traffic fatalities. Case filings for driving under the influence declined in 2020 but remained steady through the proceeding years. In December 2024, an impaired driving high-Visibility enforcement event "Night of 1,000 Stars" resulted in the highest number of driving under the influence case filings in a single month since 2019.

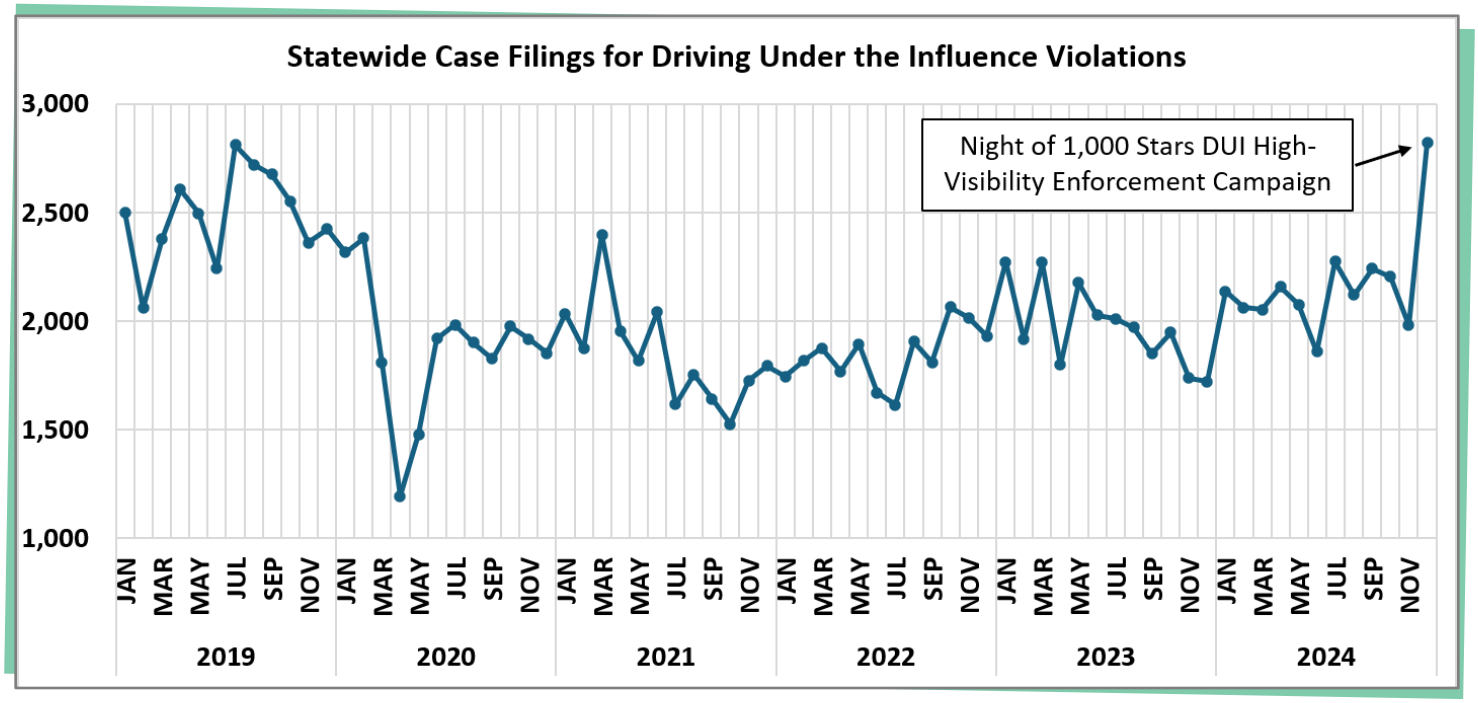
(See chart bottom of next page)





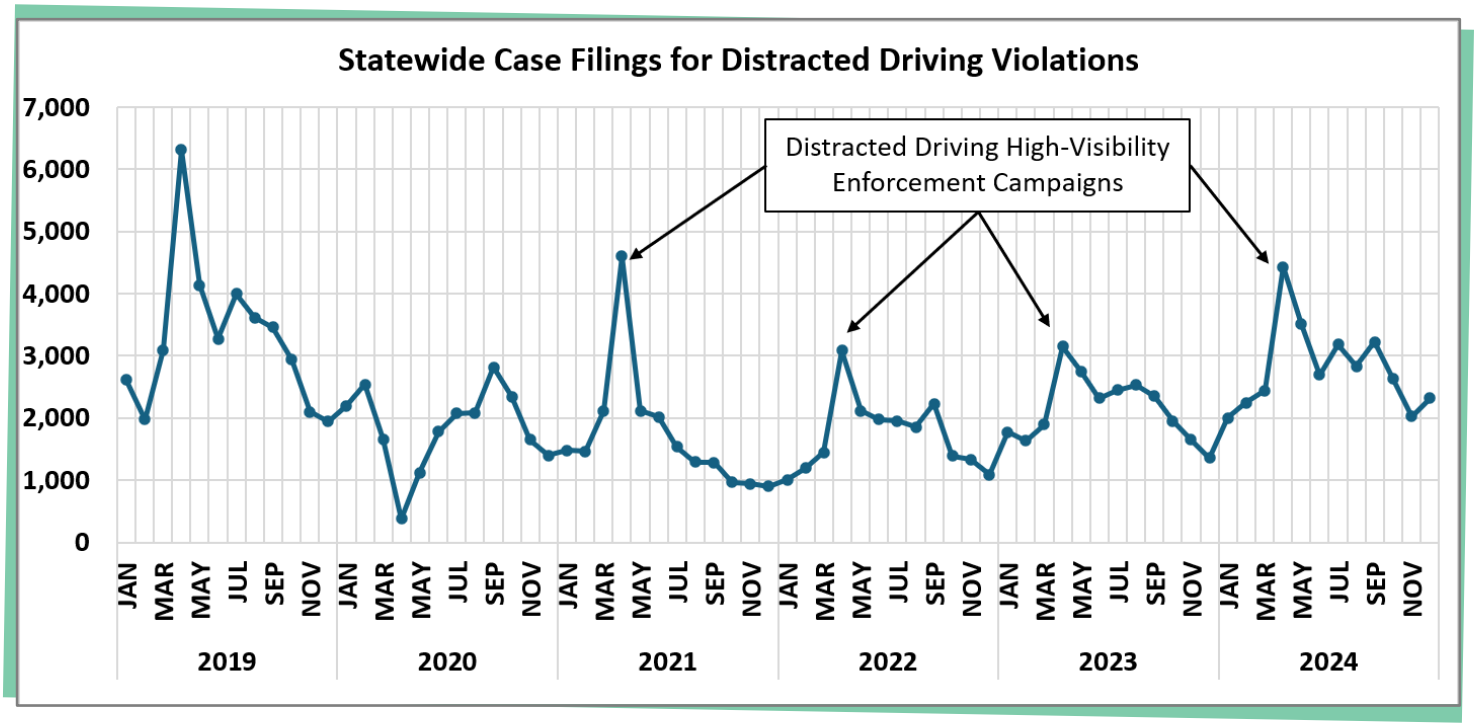


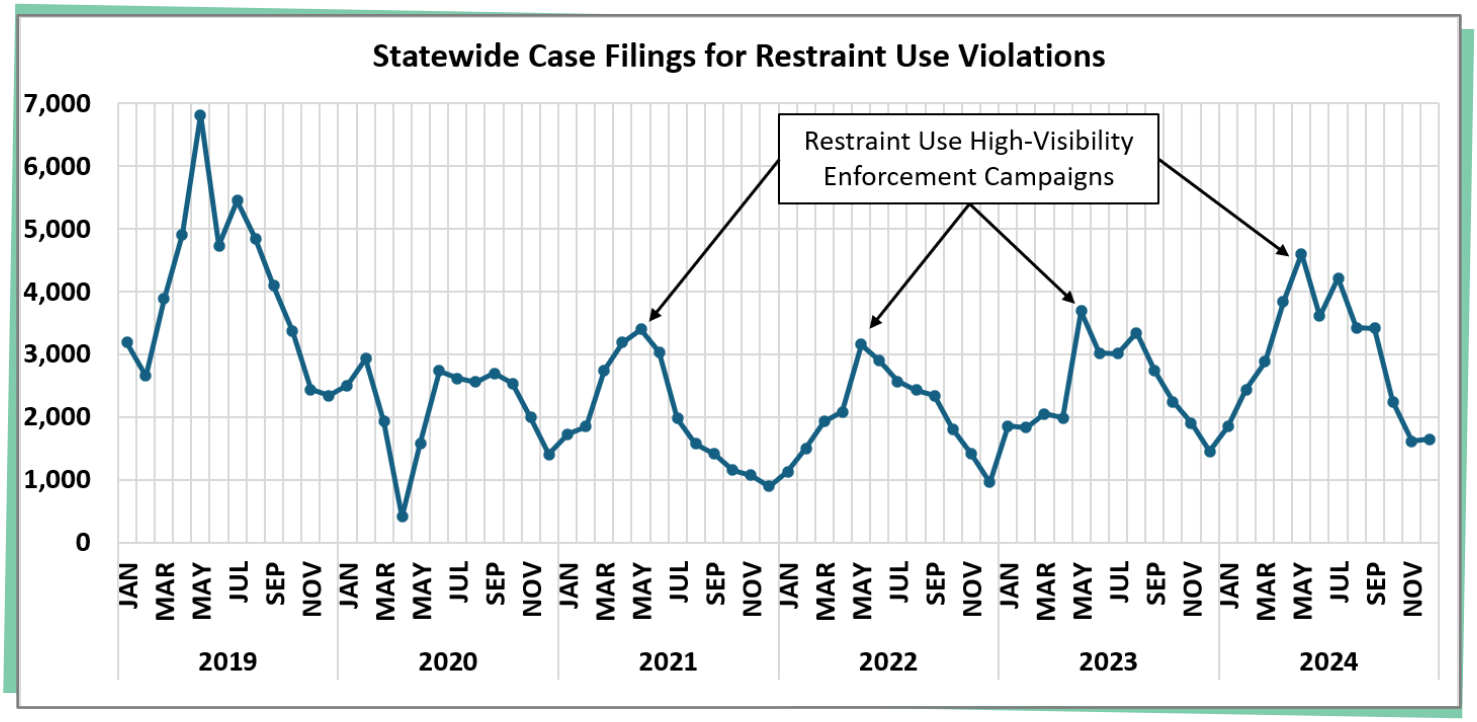




High-visibility enforcement is conducted each year in April for distracted driving violations and in May for restraint use violations. These months consistently result in the highest number of case filings in the year. Case filings during distracted driving and restraint use HVE months since 2021 remain much lower than the 2019 HVE months. However, enforcement of traffic safety violations is increasing. Annual distracted driving case filings increased 25 percent in 2023 and 30 percent in 2024. Restraint use case filings increased 20 percent in 2023 and 23 percent in 2024.

(See charts on the next page)





Data Sources

[1] Administrative Office of the Courts Judicial Information System: 2019-2024 (2024 case filings as of January 2025

[2] Traffic Fatalities Dashboard

[3] Statewide Traffic Safety Survey Dashboard

For more information, please visit the WTSC Data Dashboards at https://wtsc.wa.gov/ dashboards/, or contact the WTSC Research and Data Division at (360) 725-9860.