What NHTSA Data Show About Car Crashes

Federal crash data shows how many people die on American roads each year and which driver behaviors are involved. Every figure below comes from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and each one is tied to its data year. A car accident lawyer may cite figures like these for background, but statistics describe patterns across many crashes rather than what happened in any one of them.

## Total traffic deaths

According to NHTSA, 39,254 people died in traffic crashes in 2024, for a rate of 1.19 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Its early estimate for 2025 was 36,640 deaths, a 6.7 percent decrease from 2024, with a rate of 1.10 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Early estimates change once each year's data is finalized, so the 2025 number may move.

## Speed and alcohol

According to NHTSA, 11,288 people died in speeding-related crashes in 2024, and speeding was a contributing factor in 29 percent of all traffic fatalities that year. The same agency reports that 11,904 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2024, which the agency describes as one person every 44 minutes. About 30 percent of all traffic fatalities involve drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher. Lower levels can matter too. In 2024, 2,028 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in which a driver had a BAC of .01 to .07. Driving with a BAC of .08 or higher is illegal in every state except Utah, where the limit is .05.

## Distraction and fatigue

NHTSA states that 3,208 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2024. The https://caraccidentlawyers.wiki/reference/lawyers-and-fees/ agency notes that sending or reading a text takes a driver's eyes off the road for 5 seconds, about the length of a football field at 55 mph. Fatigue is harder to count. NHTSA estimates that in 2017, 91,000 police-reported crashes involved car accident lawyer drowsy drivers, leading to about 50,000 injuries and nearly 800 deaths, and the agency says that figure is widely considered an underestimate.

## Restraint use

NHTSA states that 22,713 passenger vehicle occupants were killed in 2024, and nearly half of them, 48 percent, were unrestrained, based on known seat belt use. The national seat belt use rate was 91.3 percent in 2025. By NHTSA's estimate, seat belts saved 14,955 lives in 2017. Some states allow the seat belt defense to reduce damages, and others limit or bar it. An auto accident attorney can explain the rule where the crash happened.

## How to read crash data

These categories overlap. A single crash can count as both speeding-related and alcohol-impaired, so the totals cannot be added together. NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) is a census of fatal crashes, while the Crash Report Sampling System (CRSS) is a sample of police-reported crashes. FARS data

and the annual Traffic Safety Facts reports come from NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis, while many states also publish their own crash data. Such databases describe crashes but do not decide fault. An automobile accident lawyer relies on the evidence in each claim, from the crash report to the medical records. This is general information, not legal advice.