

NHTSA Reports Traffic Fatalities Hit Record Low

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced that the number of overall traffic fatalities reported at the end of 2009 reached the lowest level since 1954, declining for the 15th consecutive quarter.

According to early projections, the fatality rate, which does take into account the number of miles traveled, reached the lowest level ever recorded. The fatality rate for 2009 declined to 1.16 fatalities per 100 million Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) down from 1.25 fatalities per 100 million VMT in 2008.

The projected fatality data for 2009 places the actual highway death count at 33,963, a drop of 8.9 percent from the 37,261 deaths reported in 2008.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration attributes the decline in 2009 to a combination of factors that include, high visibility consumer awareness campaigns, safer roads, safer vehicles and motorists driving less.

However, the FARS system also collects and publishes information from all types of accidents, including crashes resulting in property damage only. While the decline in fatal accidents is certainly not only attributable to fewer miles driven, earlier analysis showed that the decline in total accidents seemed to have a more direct correlation to miles driven.

From the latest government data, in 2008, there were 5.81 million total accidents in the US, down 213,000 from the 6.02 million crashes in 2007. The percentage decline was 3.5 percent. CollisionWeek found that this figure closely matches the 3.4 percent decline in overall Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) during the same period.

Taking the decline in fatality rates into consideration, it would appear that drivers are still crashing just as frequently, but the accidents are more survivable.

The 2009 fatality data from the USDOT is a preliminary estimate at this time and does not yet include the total number of accidents. The final counts for 2009 will be complete this summer when we can then compare the total number of accidents to the number of miles driven, which has been on the rise.