What NHTSA Data Show About Car Crashes

National crash data shows how many people are killed 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 attorney may cite figures like these for background, but statistics describe patterns across many crashes, not what happened in a single one.

How many people die in crashes

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 figure may be revised.

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 agency also reports that 11,904 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2024, which it describes as one person every 44 minutes. caraccidentlawyers.wiki Roughly 30 percent of all traffic fatalities involve drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher. Even lower levels matter. 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.

Distracted and drowsy driving

NHTSA states that 3,208 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2024. The agency notes that sending or reading a text takes a driver's eyes off the road for 5 seconds, roughly 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 drowsy drivers, leading to about 50,000 injuries and nearly 800 deaths, and it says that figure is widely viewed as an underestimate.

Seat belts

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. Seat belt use nationally stood at 91.3 percent in 2025. NHTSA estimates that 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 will know the rule where the crash happened.

What statistics cannot show

These categories overlap. A single crash can count as both speeding-related and alcohol-impaired, so the figures should not be added together. NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) is a census of fatal crashes, and 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. A motor vehicle accident attorney relies on each claim's own evidence, starting with the crash report and photos. This article is general information and not legal advice.