

News For Thought



Weather & Economy Drive Up Traffic Fatalities

For the first time in nearly a decade, the number of traffic deaths went up last year according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which cited warmer weather and an improving economy for the 5.3% increase in fatalities to 34,080, the highest since 2008.

The rise follows a steady decline in fatal accidents since 2005 when 43,510 people died, culminating in a 60-year-low of 32,367 in 2011, but NHTSA Administrator David Strickland said, "With a rebounding economy there's increased discretionary driving, which is clearly always the leader in terms of dangerous driving scenarios."

U.S. motorcyclist deaths outpaced the overall national numbers with a projected 9% more fatalities in 2012, up to more than 5,000, and in addition to climatic and economic factors the agency also blames a long-term decline in helmet laws with only 19 states requiring usage, down from 26 states in 1997.

"The most notable thing was the warm weather," said Dr. James Hedlund, a former NHTSA official and the author of the report by the Governors Highway Safety Association, as thirty-four states east of the Rocky Mountains notched record average temperatures from March to May 2012, and forty-eight states recorded their warmest average temperatures on record.

The report also cited two economic factors that may have contributed to an increase in the number of miles traveled via motorcycle in 2012 and thus a higher probability of accidents: a better economy and high gas prices. "An improving economy produces more discretionary income with which to buy and ride motorcycles," said the study. Several states reported an increase in the number of registrations in 2012, and Hedlund has found that over the past three decades, the number of registrations tracks closely with the number of deaths.

GHSA's recommendations for cutting motorcyclist deaths include reducing alcohol impairment, reducing speeding, increasing driver awareness, and ensuring that motorcyclists are licensed.

According to GHSA, NHTSA data shows that in 2010, nearly a quarter of riders involved in fatal accidents did not have valid licenses.

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Three-Wheelers May Be Exempted From Louisiana Helmet Law

Louisiana was the most recent state to (re)impose a mandatory helmet law for all motorcyclists back in 2004, but the House Transportation committee recently advanced legislation that would exempt a new concept vehicle from the legal category that requires drivers to wear helmets.

HB 218's exemption would apply to the three-wheeled Elio Motors vehicle, which is preparing for production at the Shreveport plant that once made pickups for General Motors. Because the Elio has three wheels, it's considered a motorcycle under federal and state safety regulations.

"It definitely affects our sales because a lot of people don't want to order the car if it requires wearing helmets," said Joel Sheltroun, vice president for governmental affairs at Elio Motors, adding that "We're not bound by automotive standards, but that is our goal."

Poker Run Legalization Bill In Illinois

Companion bills SB 1960 and HB 2520; the "Poker Run Act," have been introduced in Illinois to legalize poker runs for the charities that bikers do and for Not For Profit organizations.

"No segment in our society raises more money for charities and local citizens that are down and out on their luck than bikers," said Bob Myers, State Legislative Coordinator for ABATE of Illinois, who went on to explain; "Since 'Land Based Gaming' has become law, the Illinois liquor and Gaming agents have been tearing down our fliers in restaurants

and bars claiming they are illegal as they use poker cards, spinners, dice, and marble spinners to complete the run."

ABATE intends to use the legislation to correct problems with "poker" runs and other events that the Gaming commission and Liquor Control Board are treating as gambling.

Poker runs shall include "dice runs", "marble runs" or other events where the object is to build or obtain some matter of a score with which the participants use in a competition. Poker runs shall not constitute a game of chance under the Illinois Gaming Act or Liquor controls Act and shall not be regulated under those Acts.

Ohio Lawmakers Call For Ban On Red Light Traffic Cameras

Following a biting ruling by a judge who called traffic cameras a scam, legislation was introduced on February 20th in Columbus, Ohio by Representative Ron Maag (R-Lebanon) to eliminate the use of photo monitoring devices to detect speed and traffic signal violations. He and Rep. Dale Mallory (D-Cincinnati), one of many bipartisan co-sponsors, believe the removal of "speed-trap" cameras is necessary and must be addressed immediately since there is no existing state law regulating traffic enforcement cameras, so communities operate their programs under local ordinances.

Their hard-line stance against the cameras comes on the heels of Hamilton County Common Pleas Court Judge Robert Ruhlman's permanent injunction, which prohibits the further use of speed cameras in Elmwood Place, a Cincinnati suburb. Ruhlman granted the injunction citing there was a lack of due process for alleged violators.

Judge Ruhlman's decision was unequivocal. He made national news headlines when he called the speed camera system in Elmwood Place "a high-tech game of Three-card Monty.... It is a scam the motorist cannot win." Between the camera enforcement, the lack of proper signage, and the fees for administrative hearings, Ruhlman declared that the town of Elmwood Place had violated drivers' due-process rights, and may be the first case in the U.S. that specifically addresses the constitutionality of traffic cams.

In Ohio, there are at least 16 municipalities that use some kind of red light or speed camera, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. In the United States, there are more than 650 municipalities operating either red-light or speed cameras.

Nine states have passed laws prohibiting the use of red-light cameras, and 12 out-law speed cameras, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association, while 29 states have no law on the books. Some Ohio legislators hope to make the Buckeye State the Lucky 13th state, and House Bill 69 has been assigned to the House's Transportation, Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee for further discussion and vote.

Weird News: Illegal Alien Ruled Incompetent For Trial

An illegal alien in Massachusetts who was drunk driving when he hit and dragged a Mass. motorcyclist to his death has been ruled incompetent to stand trial. Insane? No. Mentally handicapped? Nope... "Unique cultural background"? YES!

Despite numerous previous run-ins with the law, Judge Janet Kinton-Walker ruled that Nicolas Guaman's "unique cultural background" prohibits him from understanding the U.S. legal process. The judge also ruled that Guaman lacks the ability to effectively consult with his attorney, according to FOX 25 in Boston that broke the story.

Defense attorneys across the nation will undoubtedly be watching this case very closely, and if Guaman somehow avoids justice you can count on this defense coming to a courthouse near you - "¿me entiendes?"

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