

2013 Delaware Traffic Fatality Report Shows Fatal Traffic Decline

Overall deaths haven't been under 100 since 1963

Dover – Delaware Office of Highway Safety officials are pleased to announce a 13.6% drop in fatal traffic crashes, and an even greater 14.6% drop in Delaware's traffic deaths for 2013. There were 95 fatal motor vehicle crashes resulting in 99 fatalities in 2013 compared to 110 fatal crashes resulting in 116 fatalities in 2012. This is the first time traffic fatalities have been under 100 in the last 50 years on First State roadways. 1963 was the last time the state saw under 100 fatalities when there were 96 traffic fatalities. Going back to 1929, the highest number of traffic fatalities in Delaware occurred in 1988, where 165 people were killed. The fewest number of traffic fatalities occurred in 1961 where 65 people were killed.

"While even one loss is too many, the good news is that fewer people died in traffic crashes this year than last year," said Jana Simpler, Director of the Office of Highway Safety. "The Office of Highway Safety, along with many of our partners is committed to moving Delaware *Toward Zero Deaths* on our roadways. We will continue to identify opportunities for improvements using data driven countermeasures in education and enforcement."

"These reductions came as a result of the incredible effort of our State, county and local law enforcement as well as health care representatives, the corporate community and traffic safety partners to include our Department of Transportation. While we are very proud of the success we enjoyed last year, it is imperative we understand that each of these lives

represent a human tragedy and we must continue to strive for even better in 2014," Safety and Homeland Security Secretary Lewis D. Schiliro said.

"Safety is the number one priority of the Delaware Department of Transportation," said DelDOT Secretary Shailen Bhatt. "We start every year with a goal: to reduce the number of deaths on our roads to zero. We are pleased progress is being made, but we aren't satisfied. Delaware's Strategic Highway Safety Plan aims to curb aggressive driving, reduce impaired driving, increase pedestrian safety and increase the use of seatbelts. DelDOT's Division of Motor Vehicles works with OHS and others to promote safety via education, and the licensing and inspection processes. Our construction and traffic division are always striving to reduce the number and severity of roadway-departure crashes and improve the design and operation of highway intersections and other roadway features."

The area where OHS officials saw the greatest improvement was in seat belt use. The state seat belt rate increased to an all-time high of 92% which also reflects one of the highest percentages in the country. The increased seat belt rate though is not reflected in the number of unbelted traffic crash fatalities. There were 52 vehicle occupant fatalities (drivers and passengers) in 2013 and of those killed, 48% were not wearing seat belts, the same percentage for 2012. This illustrates that the riskiest drivers are simply not buckling up.

Preliminary reports also show that 36% of the 99 (or 36%) traffic deaths in 2013 were alcohol-related. This percentage drastically decreased from 2012 when 60 (or 52%) of the 116 motorist fatalities were alcohol-related. OHS will continue with high visibility enforcement and awareness efforts in 2014 under its impaired driving prevention campaigns including NFL playoffs and Super Bowl, St. Patrick's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, *Checkpoint Strikeforce* and *Safe Family Holiday*. Officers arrested a total of 4,249 individuals in 2013 for

driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs statewide compared to 4,198 in 2012.

Pedestrian fatalities continue to be a particularly troubling area for Delaware. OHS implemented a pilot educational enforcement campaign in New Castle County for 2013 to address pedestrians crossing roadways in unsafe locations. Even though there was a slight decrease with 2013 ending with 26 pedestrian fatalities compared to 30 in 2012, OHS is committed to reducing pedestrian deaths in 2014 with more education and enforcement efforts statewide. The highest contributing factors in pedestrian fatalities include pedestrians under the influence, dart or dashing in front of cars, and pedestrians not being visible to motorists. "We are working very hard to determine any trends to these fatal crashes," said Simpler. "We will continue to work with our partners to create innovative countermeasures for 2014 in hopes of reducing the number of pedestrians killed."

Another area of concern is motorcycle safety with 2013 ending with 20 motorcycle fatalities compared to 17 in 2012 with speed on the part of the motorcyclists being the predominate contributing factor to these crashes. However helmet use continues to be high with 65% wearing helmets in 2012 and 2013.

Progress has been made in bicycle safety with Delaware experiencing 1 bicycle fatality in 2013 compared to 4 in 2012.

OHS continues to look at aggressive driving behavior issues with a focus on speeding in 2014. Delaware saw 31% of the State's 95 fatal crashes attributed to aggressive driving behaviors and 37% involving speeding as a factor. Nationally speeding contributes to roughly 30% of all fatal crashes. According to a new *National Survey of Speeding Attitudes and Behavior* released by NHTSA in December, more than half of motorists agree speeding is a problem on our nation's roads. But when it comes to refraining from the behavior, one in five

drivers admit, "I try to get where I am going as fast as I can."

Other top aggressive driving behaviors that contribute to fatal crashes in Delaware include failure to grant right of way, improper lane change, and running stop signs. Continued implementation of strategies to combat aggressive driving with a focus on speed will be more critical than ever in 2014 to reduce fatalities on our roadways.

As 2014 begins, OHS will continue to work with partners and key stakeholders to formulate plans of action to reduce overall deaths on Delaware roadways with a long term goal of zero deaths. As always, the public can get more information on Office of Highway Safety programs as well as updated traffic fatality statistics on our website located at www.ohs.delaware.gov or by following us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/DEHighwaySafe or Facebook www.facebook.com/ArriveAliveDE. The complete report and information on the national speeding survey findings can be found here <http://bit.ly/1eH4xz2>.

Delaware Fatal Crash Facts

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