

Transportation Secretary Mineta Calls Highway Fatalities National Tragedy, Says All Americans Can Do More to Improve Road Safety

NHTSA - April 20, 2006 - U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta today declared highway traffic deaths a "national tragedy" and called on all Americans to respond by wearing safety belts, using motorcycle helmets and driving sober.

According to a preliminary report from the Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 43,200 died on the nation's highways in 2005, up from 42,636 in 2004. Injuries dropped from 2.79 million in 2004 to 2.68 million in 2005, a decline of 4.1 percent. Fifty-five percent of passenger vehicle occupants who died in 2005 were unbelted.

"Every year this country experiences a national tragedy that is as preventable as it is devastating," said Secretary Mineta. "We have the tools to prevent this tragedy – every car has a safety belt, every motorcycle rider should have a helmet and everyone should have enough sense to never drive while impaired".

NHTSA's report projects a fatality rate of 1.46 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT), up from the record low of 1.44 in 2004. NHTSA also found safety belt use is at 82 percent nationwide.

The report also projects the eighth straight increase in motorcycle fatalities. In 2005, 4,315 motorcyclists died, a 7.7 percent increase. In 2004, there were 4,008 motorcycle fatalities, the report said. Mineta added that the majority of passenger vehicle occupants who died in 2005 were unbelted, despite the fact that safety belt use is at an historic high of 82 percent nation wide.

Traffic crashes come at an enormous cost to society, Mineta noted. NHTSA estimates show that highway crashes cost society \$230.6 billion a year, about \$820 per person.

"We could save thousands of lives every year if everyone buckled up," said Jacqueline Glassman, NHTSA acting administrator.

NHTSA also is projecting the following changes between 2004 and 2005:

- * Overall alcohol-related fatalities increased 1.7 percent from 16,694 to 16,972.
- * Passenger car fatalities dropped 1.8 percent while light truck occupants killed increased by 4.3 percent.
- * Pedestrian deaths increased slightly, from 4,641 to 4,674.
- * Fatalities from large truck crashes increased slightly from 5,190 to 5,226.
- * Vehicle miles traveled are projected to increase slightly to 2.964 trillion, up from 2.963 trillion in 2004, according to the DOT's Federal Highway Administration.

* The number of registered vehicles increased from 238 million in 2004 to 243 million in 2005.

NHTSA collects the crash statistics from 50 states and the District of Columbia to produce the annual report on traffic fatality trends. The final 2005 report, pending completion of data collection and quality control verification, will be available in late summer. Summaries of the preliminary report are available on the NHTSA web site at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/PPT/2006/810583.pdf>.