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. The figures below come from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and each is labeled with its year. A car accident lawyer might use numbers like these for context, but statistics describe patterns across many crashes rather than what happened in any one of them.

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.

Speeding and impaired driving

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 same agency reports that 11,904 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2024, which the agency describes as one person every 44 minutes. About 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. Every state except Utah, which uses .05, sets the limit at a BAC of .08.

Distracted and drowsy driving

NHTSA reports that 3,208 people were killed in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2024. It notes that sending or reading a text takes a driver's eyes off *car accident lawyers consultation* the road for 5 seconds, about the length of a football field at 55 mph. Drowsy driving is harder to measure. NHTSA estimates that in 2017, 91,000 police-reported crashes involved drowsy drivers, leading to about 50,000 injuries and nearly 800 deaths, and the agency says that figure is widely considered an underestimate.

Restraint use

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. In some states, not wearing a seat belt can be raised to reduce damages, while other states limit that defense. A car accident lawyer can explain the rule where the crash happened.

How to read crash data

These categories overlap. One crash can fall into the speeding and alcohol categories at once, so the totals cannot be added together. NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) is a census of fatal crashes, while the Crash Report Sampling System (CRSS) is a sample of police-reported crashes. NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis publishes FARS data and the annual Traffic Safety Facts reports, and many states publish crash data of their own. These databases describe crashes but do not assign fault. An

automobile accident lawyer relies on the evidence in each claim, from the crash report to the medical records. This is general information, not legal advice.