



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **PennDOT, State Police Highlight Law Awareness Week, Urge Safe Driving**

**Harrisburg, PA** – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) came together today with Penn State Health at their Life Lion Hangar to highlight driver safety laws and urge motorists to put safety first.

According to [early estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#), national traffic fatalities in the first nine months of 2021 rose approximately 12 percent over 2020.

In Pennsylvania, 2021 preliminary data shows deaths on our roadways increased by as much as 10 percent, including increases in fatalities in speeding crashes, distracted driving crashes, crashes involving a 16- or 17-year-old driver, as well as unrestrained fatalities.

While fatalities in crashes involving impaired driving have remained relatively flat in recent years, data shows fatalities in crashes involving drinking drivers have been declining, while fatalities in crashes involving drugged drivers have been increasing.

"While we cannot definitively say what is causing fatalities to increase, we can definitively say that safety on our roadways is everyone's responsibility," said PennDOT Acting Executive Deputy Secretary Melissa Batula. "Please slow down, pay attention, never drive impaired, and buckle up. Buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones in a crash."

In 2020, it is estimated that 94 percent of unbelted occupants, or 305 people, who were killed in crashes while traveling in passenger vehicles, including cars, small trucks, vans, and SUVs, could have survived if they had been buckled up.

"We can all do our part to prevent crashes on Pennsylvania's roadways," said Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner Robert Evanchick. "Please keep these important lifesaving laws in mind when you're behind the wheel."

PennDOT 2021 crash data is expected to be available by early June. All currently available data is publicly accessible online at [PennDOT's Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool](#) (PCIT).

Pennsylvania's Highway Safety Law Awareness Week is next week, February 20-26, and this year features safety laws that impact crashes and fatalities each year.

- Distracted Driving: [Pennsylvania's Texting-While-Driving Ban](#) prohibits as a primary offense any driver from using an Interactive Wireless Communication Device (IWCD) to send, read or write a text-based communication while his or her vehicle is in motion.
- Seat Belts: [Pennsylvania law requires any occupant younger than 18 to buckle up](#) when riding in a vehicle, as well as drivers and front-seat passengers. Children under the age of two must

be secured in a rear-facing car seat, and children under the age of four must be restrained in an approved child safety seat. Children must ride in a booster seat until their eighth birthday.

- Impaired Driving: [Pennsylvania law prohibits individuals from driving while impaired](#) by alcohol and/or drugs. Penalties for driving while impaired depend on the individual's level of impairment and prior offenses and can include up to \$10,000 in fines, up to five years in prison, up to 18 months license suspension, one year of ignition interlock, and more. For more information on the penalties, check out [Pennsylvania's DUI Law](#).
- Speeding: [Pennsylvania law on speed restrictions](#) requires motorists to drive at reasonable and prudent speeds for the current conditions. Drivers must drive at a safe and appropriate speed when approaching and crossing intersections, railroad grade crossings, when approaching and going around a curve, while approaching a hill crest, when traveling upon any narrow or winding roadway, and when special hazards exist with respect to pedestrians, other traffic, or weather or highway conditions. This law is sometimes called the "assured clear distance" rule because it requires motorists to operate at a speed at which they can stop within an "assured clear distance." Drivers may be ticketed for rear-ending another vehicle because they violated this law by not stopping within the following distance they allowed.
- [Pennsylvania's Young Driver Law](#): Pennsylvania licenses young drivers through a three-stage program, reflecting the driver's gradual progression in skill, experience, and decision-making ability. The law has proven effective in reducing crashes and fatalities for 16- and 17-year-olds.

"In 2021, Life Lion responded to more than 1,950 motor vehicle crashes across central Pennsylvania, many of which involved traumatic injuries that resulted in transport to a hospital for further treatment," said Keith McMinn, director of Penn State Health Life Lion Services. "Whether by ground or air, our first responders across the health system and Life Lion EMS are always prepared to provide high-quality, timely care – but many of these accidents are preventable. We encourage drivers buckle up and stay alert because this is one statistic we would like to see decrease."

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently released their new comprehensive [National Roadway Safety Strategy \(NRSS\)](#), a roadmap for addressing roadway fatalities and serious injuries through the adoption of a "Safe System Approach." Pennsylvania is in the process of updating the state strategy for reducing traffic deaths, which addresses safety across multiple contributing factors similar to the new national strategy. The updated 2022 [Pennsylvania Strategic Highway Safety Plan \(SHSP\)](#) – anticipated to be finalized later this month – will incorporate Safe System thoughts and practices.

For more information on PennDOT's highway safety efforts visit, [www.PennDOT.gov/safety](http://www.PennDOT.gov/safety).

For more information on the Pennsylvania State Police, visit [psp.pa.gov](http://psp.pa.gov).

PennDOT's [media center](#) offers social-media-sized graphics highlighting topics such as seat belts, impaired driving, and distracted driving for organizations, community groups, or others who share safety information with their stakeholders.

The public can join the discussion on social media using the hashtags #BeSafePA and #PATrafficLaw.

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