



## ISSUE: TRAFFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Introduction

This fact sheet describes the role of law enforcement in addressing four key issues that directly impact Iowa's fatality and serious injury rates: (1) speeding and other moving violations; (2) impaired driving; (3) safety belt and other occupant protection device use; and (4) commercial motor carriers and vehicle operators. In addition to routine traffic enforcement efforts, there are several activities carried out each year that draw special attention to these safety concerns and temporarily step up enforcement to address them. A special emphasis has been placed on describing those activities in this document.

### Enforcing Iowa Traffic Laws

The responsibility for enforcement of Iowa's traffic laws falls to agencies in three jurisdictions-- state, county and local governments. There are more than 6,000 active law enforcement officers in the state.



#### Iowa Department of Public Safety

The mission of the Iowa State Patrol, a part of the Iowa Department of Public Safety, is to work daily to preserve lives, rights and property through courtesy, service and protection. State Troopers routinely patrol nearly 100,000 miles of state roadways (interstates, state highways and secondary county roads). The Iowa State Patrol currently employs 403 state troopers.

#### Iowa Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau

The Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB), also a part of the Iowa Department of Public Safety, administers a number of federally funded highway safety initiatives.

GTSB's primary source of funding comes from Section 402, a U.S. Code section establishing state highway safety programs. The funds are administered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). In turn, GTSB uses them to support state and community programs

that reduce deaths and injuries on the highways. In Iowa, funds are targeted to nine major emphasis areas: (1) impaired driving; (2) occupant protection; (3) speed; (4) police traffic services; (5) emergency medical services; (6) pedestrian/bicycle safety; (7) motorcycle safety; (8) traffic records; and (9) roadway safety.



#### Iowa Department of Transportation

The Iowa Department of Transportation's (Iowa DOT) Office of Motor Vehicle Enforcement includes

130 officers and investigators. Responsibilities of the uniformed officers include enforcement of the state and federal motor carrier and commercial vehicle operator laws and regulations. Those laws address safety issues such as driver qualifications, hours of service, operating authority, motor carrier registration and insurance, combination of vehicle and load size and weight, transportation of hazardous materials, and fuel use. Responsibilities of the investigators include enforcement of the laws relating to vehicle registration, dealer licensing, motor vehicle inspection, odometer tampering, driver license fraud, use tax investigations, and salvage theft examinations.



#### County and Municipal Law Enforcement

Serving the state's 99 counties are the county sheriff departments. Peace officers responsible for enforcing traffic laws at the local level are employed by the municipal police departments.

### Speed Management

Speeding — exceeding the posted speed limit or driving too fast for conditions — is one of the most prevalent factors contributing to traffic crashes.

Speeding increases the severity of vehicle crashes, reduces a driver's ability to steer safely around curves or objects in the roadway, and extends the distance necessary for stopping a vehicle in reaction to a dangerous situation.

For instance, when traveling at 55 miles per hour, total stopping distance (assuming ¾-second reaction time) is 204 feet. When traveling at 65 miles per hour, total stopping distance is 272 feet. An 18 percent increase in speed (from 55 to 65) results in a 33 percent increase in stopping distance.

### Iowa Problem Identification

- During 2000, excessive speed or driving too fast for conditions was cited as a contributing factor in 46 of Iowa's 394 fatal crashes.
- Speed ranks behind only alcohol and stop light/stop sign violations as a contributing factor in fatal crashes in Iowa.
- Speed also plays a part in a number of serious-injury crashes. In 2000, more than 200 persons suffered serious injuries in speed-related crashes.

### Enforcement Activities

Engineering, education and enforcement all play a role in managing traffic speeds. Rational speed limits promote public safety by providing drivers with information that will help them choose a reasonable and prudent speed that is appropriate for the existing conditions. Rational speed limits are determined through a formal process that considers the speed of free flowing traffic, roadway geometry, design characteristics and land use. This procedure results in a speed limit that is reasonable to a vast majority of drivers and falls within the speed range of minimum risk. Strict enforcement of rational speed limits, focused on flagrant speed limit violators, is a primary emphasis of state and local speed enforcement activities.



### Safety Belt and Other Occupant Protection Use

Safety belt use is the single most effective strategy a person can employ to prevent deaths and injuries and reduce the costs associated with motor vehicle crashes.

### Iowa Problem Identification

- Besides impaired driving, speeding and stop sign/light violations, the lack of restraint use is a major contributor to death and serious injury in traffic crashes.
- Low-use populations (identified through crash outcomes, seat belt citations and observational surveys) include persons age 16-30 (particularly males), vehicle operators in rural areas and children ages 3-5.
- Iowa ranks among the top seven states in the nation and first in the Midwest in safety belt usage, with an average usage rate of 87 percent. In 2003, the national seat belt usage averaged 79 percent.
- Usage rates have continued to rise in Iowa from a meager 18 percent in August 1985 to 71 percent in 1992, 78 percent in 2000, and 87 percent in September 2003. Each percent of increase means at least 28,000 more Iowans are buckling up.
- The Iowa DOT's "Life Toll" record for the period of July 1986 through December 13, 2004, lists the names of 5,442 people spared death or life-threatening injury because they buckled up.
- Law enforcement officers issued more than 65,000 safety belt usage citations in 2002.

### Enforcement Activities

#### sSTEP

The federally funded "special Traffic Enforcement Program---sSTEP" is a collaborative/multi-jurisdictional effort intended to increase safety belt use in the state. The federal fiscal year (FFY) 2003 program (Nov. 1, 2002, to Sept. 30, 2003), consisted of 66 joint operations involving the Iowa DOT's Office of Motor Vehicle Enforcement, Iowa State Patrol, and 49 sheriffs' offices and 122 police departments (representing 90 percent of Iowa's 99 counties). It also should be noted that during the entire history of sSTEP in Iowa, DOT motor vehicle enforcement officers have supported the program without the benefit of funding. This year, 1,342 commercial vehicle inspections were conducted, resulting in 223 commercial vehicles and 112 drivers being taken out of service.

FFY2003 sSTEP-reported activity:

- 81,000 enforcement contacts
- 15,449 safety belt violation contacts
- 922 child restraint violation contacts
- 1,594 OWI arrests/contacts
- 30,116 speed violation contacts

### Operation C.A.R.E.

The Iowa State Patrol's Operation C.A.R.E. program is part of a nationwide holiday enforcement initiative. Last year it resulted in a total of 3,329 enforcement hours. Officers generated 1,066 occupant protection contacts and more than 7,000 speed/moving violation contacts. Holiday periods targeted by C.A.R.E. include Thanksgiving, Christmas, Memorial Day, the 4th of July and Labor Day.



### Impaired Driving

Crashes related to impaired driving constitute one of the nation's leading health problems. These events result in more deaths each year than the total number of homicides.

The impact is particularly severe among young people, ages 15-24. In that group, impaired driving is the leading cause of death. Clearly, impaired driving and impaired-related crashes constitute a major threat to the safety and well being of the public. Despite significant reductions in Iowa's alcohol-related fatalities and injuries during the past decade, impaired driving remains a significant factor in traffic-related death and injury in our state.

On April 23, 2003, Iowa Governor Thomas J. Vilsack signed legislation making Iowa the 39th state to enact .08 BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration limit). The .08 BAC law became effective July 1, 2003.

With a .08 BAC a person is three times more likely to be involved in a traffic crash than if they had not been drinking. At .10 BAC (Iowa's historic BAC limit) a person is 12 times more likely to be involved in a crash.

National studies estimate that Iowa's new .08 law may save 10-16 lives per year due to the reduction of impaired driving crashes.

### Iowa Problem Identification

- During 2003, 124 alcohol-related traffic deaths were reported in Iowa, up by 2 percent from the 2002 total of 121. Twenty-eight percent of Iowa's traffic fatalities are alcohol related.
- According to the NHTSA, Iowa's alcohol-related fatality rate for 2002 (.42 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled) is the sixth lowest in the nation.

- Nearly 30 percent of all victims who died in alcohol-related crashes in Iowa from 1994-2003 were 25 years old or younger.
- Drivers 16-25 years of age represent only 16 percent of all registered drivers in Iowa, but they comprise over 30 percent of all drinking drivers who were involved in fatal crashes during 1994-2003.
- OWI arrests in Iowa increased significantly between 1974 and 1993, increasing from about 4,000 to an estimated 20,000 in 1993. Since that time, OWI arrests have leveled off and currently stand at 17,000 (year 2003 estimate).

### Enforcement Activities

Six police departments and seven sheriff's offices participated in the FFY2003 alcohol-related enforcement activities under Iowa's Section 402 Highway Safety Program. Agencies used selective overtime enforcement to focus on OWI and other alcohol-related violations. Special emphasis was given to nighttime enforcement, primarily on weekends, due to the elevated risk of alcohol-related crashes. Cooperative enforcement strategies included safety/sobriety checkpoints, saturation patrols and corridor projects. These agencies made 780 alcohol-related enforcement contacts, an average of 60 per agency.



### Commercial Motor Carriers and Vehicle Operators

In 1986 the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration responded to the proliferation of state motor carrier and commercial vehicle operator programs by adopting the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act. This act defined new national standards for commercial drivers, the equipment and maintenance of vehicles, and fitness of operating companies. These standards are now incorporated into the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 49.

Iowa law enforcement officers need no additional training to enforce truck moving violations, such as speeding and unsafe lane changes. But for officers making even cursory checks of commercial vehicle equipment, maintenance and loading, special knowledge is essential, along with instruction in assessing the validity of truck registrations. State law enforcement officers assigned to this

specialized duty are employed by the Iowa DOT's Office of Motor Vehicle Enforcement.

### Iowa Problem Identification

- In 2002 there were 115,425 five-ton-plus trucks, 14,272 truck-tractors and 63,532 semi-trailers registered in Iowa.
- During 2003 a total of 72 persons were killed in Iowa traffic crashes involving semis and straight trucks. This total is up by 7 percent from 2002 when 67 persons died.
- On average, more than 85 percent of all fatality victims in large-truck crashes are occupants of the other vehicle in the crash.
- Persons killed in 2003 Iowa crashes involving large trucks represent over 16 percent, or 1 out of 6, of all traffic fatalities in the state during that period. Approximately 11 percent of all U.S. traffic fatalities involved larger trucks.
- More than 2,000 commercial vehicle operators were involved in crashes during 2000. The vast majority of these operators were between 25 and 54 years of age.
- Large-truck operator actions which contributed to crashes in 2000, include the following: failure to have control; obscured vision; inattention or distraction; drowsiness or fatigue; failure to yield to traffic control device; speeding; improper lane change; improper turn; and following too closely.
- In AAA and federal crash causation studies of truck-involved fatal crashes, investigators assign unsafe driving factors to the passenger vehicle driver in up to 75 percent of all crashes (source: American Trucking Association).
- In 2002 the Federal Motor Carrier Administration identified 660 hazardous materials carriers in Iowa.

### Enforcement Activities

Iowa's comprehensive commercial vehicle safety program reaches commercial vehicles in several locations to ensure reasonably thorough coverage. Vehicles are typically inspected and weighed at scale/inspection facilities, and by roving commercial motor vehicle enforcement officers. There are 20 weigh scale facilities in Iowa: 14 on the Interstate System and six on the Primary Road System. Two of the interstate scales have weigh-in-motion technology. Five of the interstate scales have PrePass technology. Iowa also has three locations off the interstate for inspecting trucks and utilizing

portable scales. In 2003, officers conducted 62,338 commercial motor vehicle safety inspections. They also issued 8,057 overweight violations resulting in \$2.2 million in fines deposited into the Road Use Tax Fund.

In addition to routine inspections, each year the Iowa DOT's motor vehicle officers participate in "Roadcheck," a North American event involving 10,000 inspectors. During this year's intense, three-day screening, more than 1,000 vehicles were inspected, and vehicles and drivers were placed out of service for serious vehicle defects or driver violations.

Supporting these inspection efforts and improving large-truck safety in Iowa is a network of data collection systems. As lead state in the national Performance and Registration Information Systems Management program, Iowa continues to target high-risk carriers. This process identifies and prioritizes motor carriers for safety inspections.

Iowa also uploads all commercial motor vehicle inspections to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Motor Carrier Management System. The inspection information becomes part of a motor carrier's total safety performance record. The motor carrier's safety performance status is available via the Inspection Selection System at the roadside to the motor vehicle officers and used as a means to select high-risk carriers for inspection.

Modern technology, including weigh-in-motion, portable scales, preliminary breath testers, pen-based computers, and mobile data transmission capabilities in the patrol cars have enhanced the motor vehicle officers' enforcement capabilities over the last two decades.

**Sources:** National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa State Patrol, Iowa Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, and Iowa Law Enforcement Academy