

# Chapter 6 Driver Behaviors



Driver behaviors are often a leading factor in crash causation. About 85% of Maine crashes noted at least one unsafe behavior. Police crash reports can identify 22 unsafe behaviors. This chapter covers the leading Maine crash driver behaviors: Aggressive Driving (includes 5 contributing factors - with speed being the chief concern); Driver Inattention and Distraction; and Drowsy Driver.

## Section A: Aggressive Driving

While overall crash trends are down, those related to aggressive driving are steadily increasing. Better roads, improved comfort, handling and other vehicle safety features may contribute to the growing phenomenon of unsafe speed and other aggressive driving practices that result in crash injury and death.

Aggressive driving occurs when a driver displays risky behavior. For the purpose of this report, aggressive driving is deemed to have occurred when one or more of the following Driver Contributing Factors are identified in Police Crash Reports:

- Disregard of Traffic Control Device
- Following Too Close
- Illegal or Unsafe Speed
- Improper Passing
- Improper, Unsafe Lane Change.

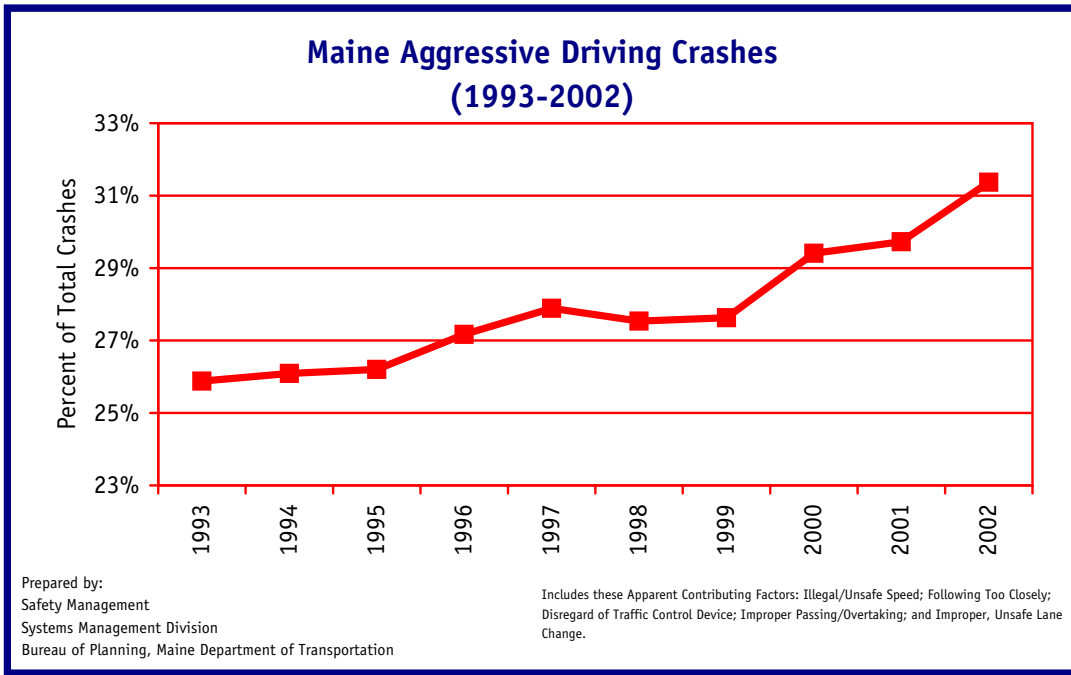
Other potential factors that were not considered include Failure to Yield the Right of Way; Driving Left of Center - not passing; and Hit and Run, as these factors may or may not reflect an aggressive driving style. For example, this latter group could also be the result of Driver Inattention.

### Crash Data

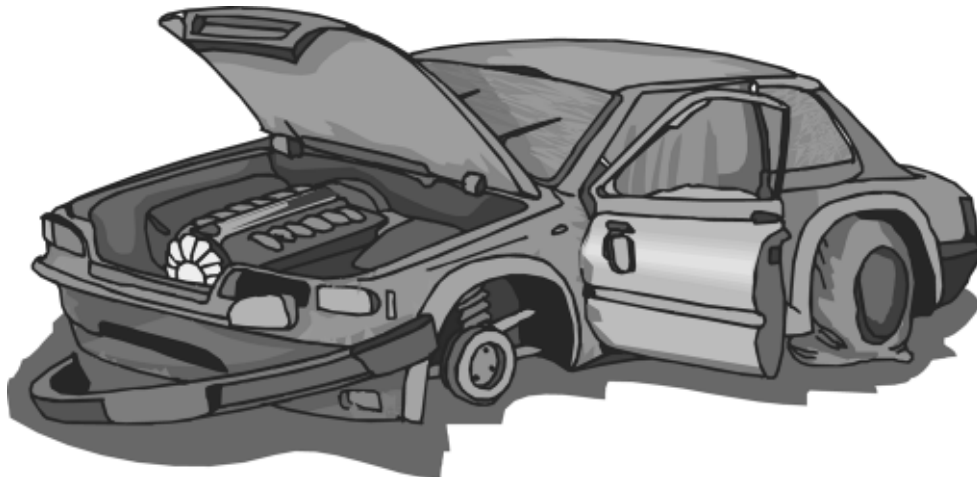
- In 2002, there were 11,589 crashes related to Aggressive Driving (31% of all crashes), resulting in 75 fatalities (40% of all fatalities) and 6,100 injuries.

This compares to 1993, when there were 9,490 crashes (26% of all crashes) resulting in 64 fatalities (35% of total fatalities) and 5,100 injuries.

- **Speed** is the leading Aggressive Driving concern, resulting in 55% of all Aggressive Driving crashes and 85% of Aggressive Driving fatalities.



The number of crashes involving aggressive driving has continuously increased over the past decade, and now accounts for nearly 1/3 of all Maine crashes and 40% of all fatalities.



# Driver Behaviors



## Section B: Driver Inattention and Distraction

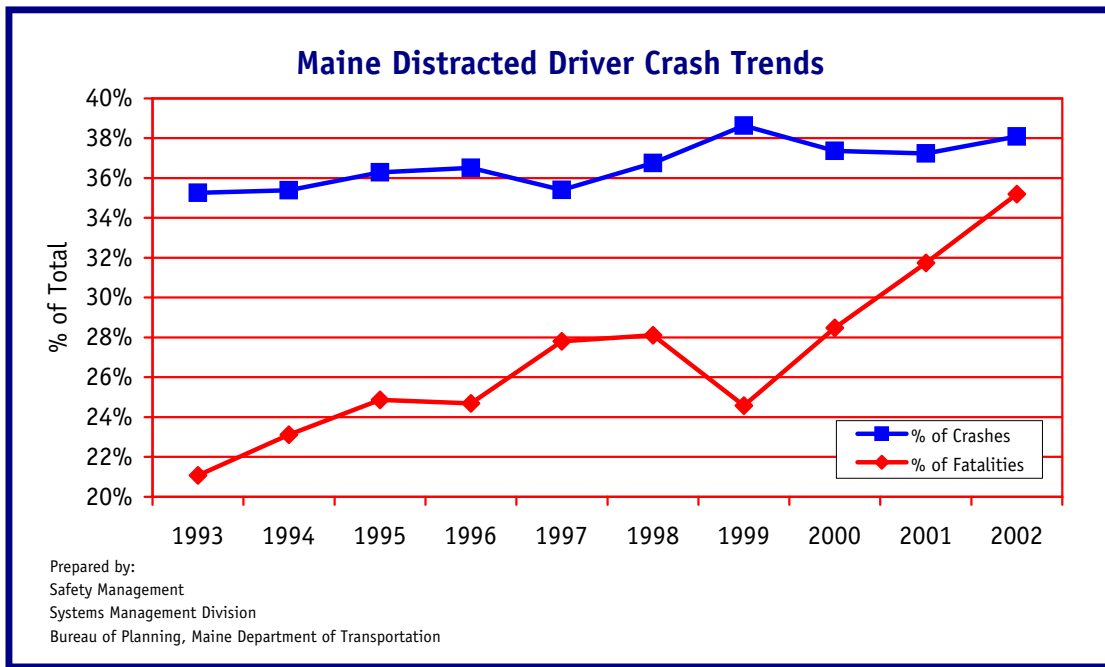
Driver inattention and distraction is a growing crash concern. Vehicle comforts and conveniences can sometimes draw a driver's attention away from the road. Drivers also find themselves multi-tasking – such as driving while eating, talking on the cell phone and interacting with passengers. Driving is a full time task demanding full concentration in order to remain on course, identify dangerous situations and for quick, safe decision making.

Distractions can be either those that take the driver's visual attention away from the road or mental, when the focus is on something other than the driving. Visual distractions include operating vehicle controls, changing CD's, looking for items, eating and drinking. Mental distractions occur when the driver is focused on non-driving subjects or is stressed or emotional. Distractions can be a combination of mental and visual demands such as conversations with passengers or cell phone use. Whatever the form, distraction or inattention can lead to dangerous crash producing situations.

### Crash Data

Driving while Distracted or Inattentive is the number one contributing factor identified in Maine police crash reports.

- 14,000 crashes resulted from driver inattention or distraction in 2002, resulting in 69 fatalities and over 7,000 injuries.
- The number of crashes has increased from 12,929 crashes in 1993 to 14,069 in 2002. The percentage to total crashes is also rising, from 35.3% in 1993 to 38.1% in 2002.
- Driver inattention fatalities have risen sharply, from 39 in 1993 to 69 in 2002. The increase in percentage of total crash fatalities is from 21.1% in 1993 to 35.2% in 2002.



Crashes related to driver distraction/inattention have increased slightly in the past 10 years, from 35 to 38% of the total, but resulting fatalities have increased significantly, from 21% to 35%.



# Driver Behaviors



## Section C: Drowsy Driver

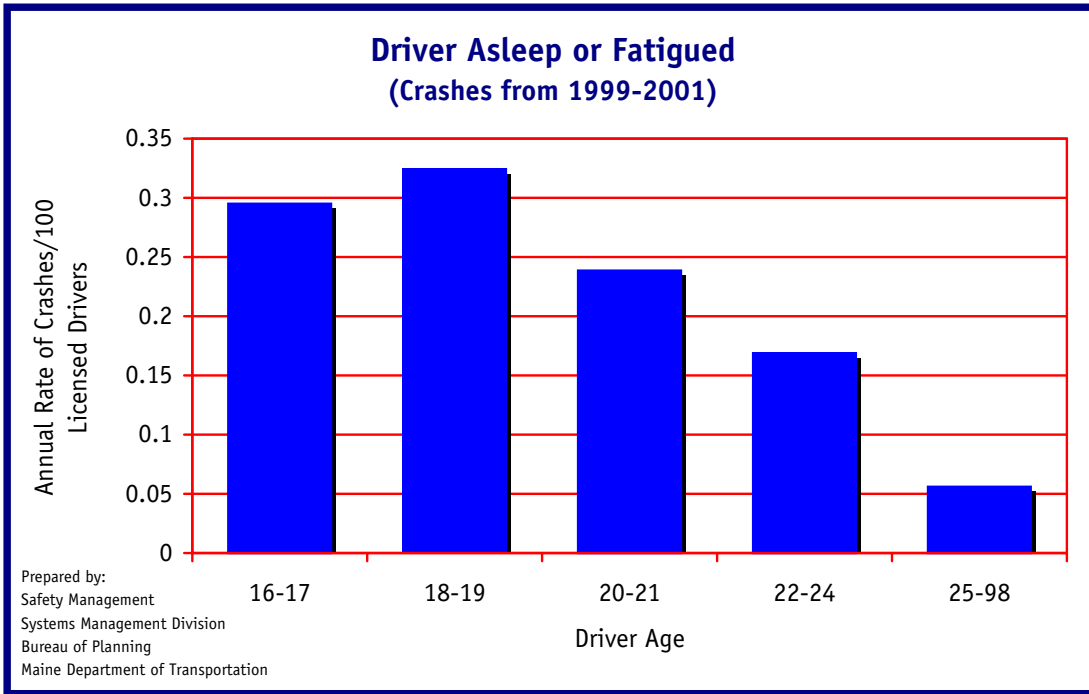
Drowsy driving appears to be increasing in Maine. Surveys conducted have indicated that more people are falling asleep while driving. A person that falls asleep on the roadway is just as dangerous as a drunk driver.

### Statewide

- Capturing statistical information on Drowsy Driving is somewhat limited since crashes involving running off the road that cause little damage often go unreported. The Police Crash Reporting System does capture the categories of Asleep and Fatigued as apparent physical conditions, but police may use inattention and distraction as a contributing factor, while, in fact, the driver was asleep. The Fatal Analysis Reporting System data from Maine indicates that drowsy driving is a contributing factor in some fatal crashes in Maine.
- Over the past 10 years, an annual average of 700 Asleep/Fatigued-related crashes have been reported resulting in 11 fatalities and 500 injuries.
- Younger drivers are 5 times more likely to be in an Asleep/Fatigued-related crash than the rest of the driving population.

### Comparison with National Trends

- NHTSA conservatively estimates that 100,000 crashes are the direct result of sleep deprivation each year. These crashes cause over 1,500 deaths and 71,000 injuries.
- A national survey done by NHTSA on driver fatigue noted that 37% of the drivers polled indicated they had fallen asleep at the wheel at least once in their driving career. Some factors about the drowsy driver are: average of only 6 hours of sleep, driving an average of 2.9 hours, driving on the interstate where speed limits are 55 mph and above, and nearly half fell asleep between the hours of 9 PM and 6 AM.
- The National Sleep Foundation has additional information on Drowsy Driving at their website [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).



Younger drivers are 5 times more likely to be in a crash when they were Asleep or Fatigued.

