



Driver Behaviors

Chapter 4

The leading causes of crashes are unsafe driver behaviors. At least one unsafe behavior was noted in nearly all the crashes in Maine. Police Reports can identify 22 unsafe behaviors (please see page 47 of the appendix for the list of contributing factors in Maine Police Crash Reports).

This Chapter highlights the four leading unsafe behaviors behind crashes in Maine: Impaired Driving, Speed, Distraction/Inattention and Drowsy Driving.

Section A: Impaired Driving

Society has become less tolerant of drinking and driving. The decrease in alcohol related fatalities over the past 30 years reflects this changing attitude. Today, there are far fewer crashes and fatalities where drinking and driving were reported than in 1976, when fewer miles were being traveled.

The FARS administered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicates that any positive blood alcohol level is considered an alcohol related fatality (for drivers and pedestrians only). There is increased attention to crashes where a driver has a blood alcohol content of .08 or greater.

Statewide

- Maine has come a long way since the late 1970's when Maine's alcohol related fatalities were 60% of the total. In the last several decades, alcohol related crash fatalities have greatly decreased to a level of nearly 28% in 2009.
- In 1980 there were 157 alcohol related crash fatalities. In 2009 that number dropped to 44 fatalities, 113 fewer deaths than in 1980.
- Since 2002, when the percent of alcohol related fatalities was 18.5%, the percentage of alcohol related fatalities has increased to 27.7% in 2009.
- Maine is slightly below the FARS national alcohol related crash rate of 32%.
- In 2009, Maine had 50 alcohol-related fatal crashes. Forty-four of these fatal crashes had a BAC of .08 or higher.
- Impaired driving includes driving while under the influence of drugs which includes illegal drugs, prescription drugs, and drugs available over the counter. Arrests for OUI-drugs are on the rise.



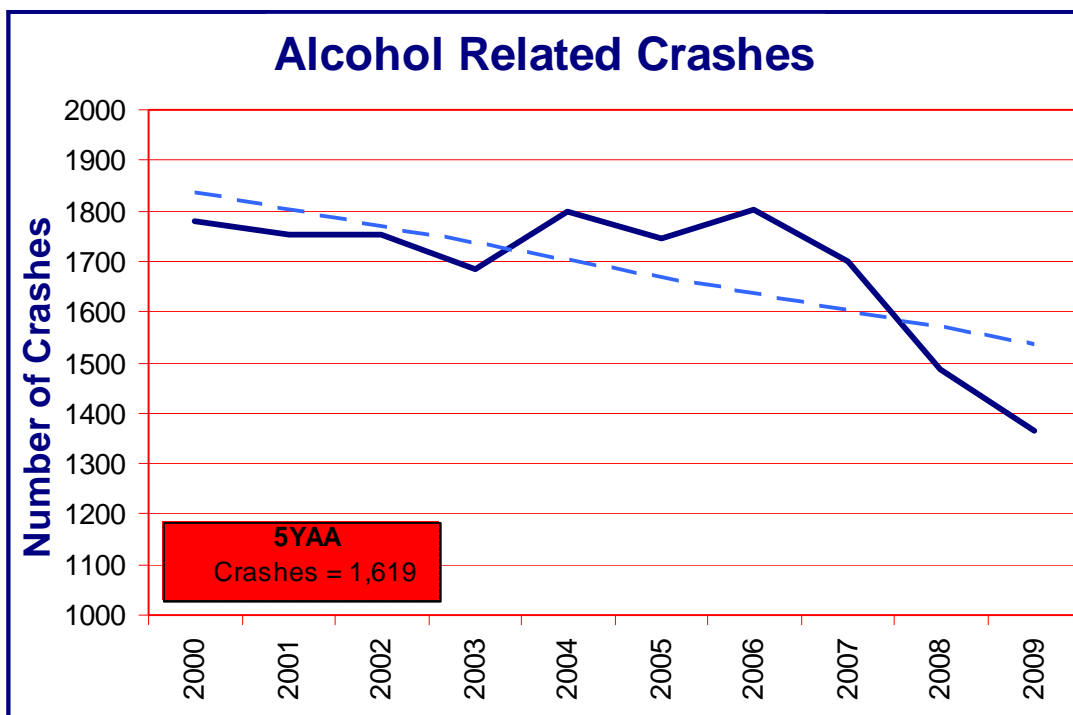
- Enforcement - The number of arrests for operating under the influence (OUI) has fluctuated between 9,000 and 11,000 a year for the last three years. Federal OUI grant programs have been available to law enforcement agencies on a yearly basis. These enforcement programs are designed to specifically arrest violators for operating under the influence of alcohol/drugs.

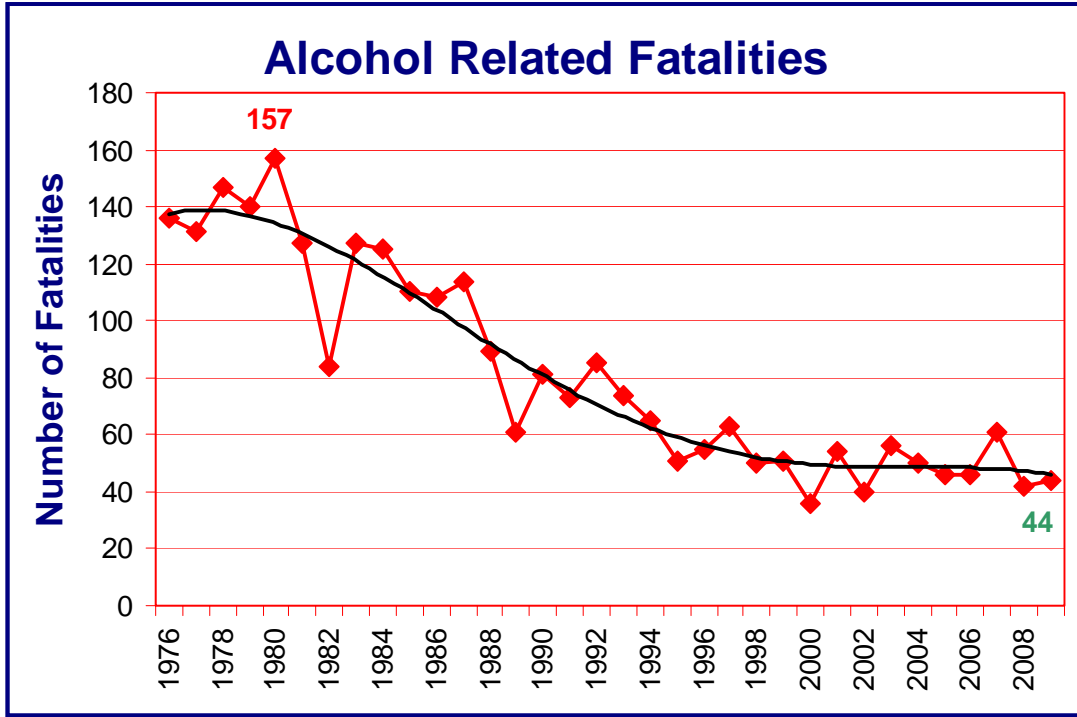
YEAR	ARRESTS
2007	10,482
2008	9,318
2009	10,569

Comparison with National Trends

A national study conducted by NHTSA in 2008 estimates alcohol-related fatalities are 37% of the total fatalities. This percentage has been relatively stable for the past five years. Alcohol-related crash fatalities predominantly:

- Occurred at night and on weekends
- Involved drivers between the ages of 21-24



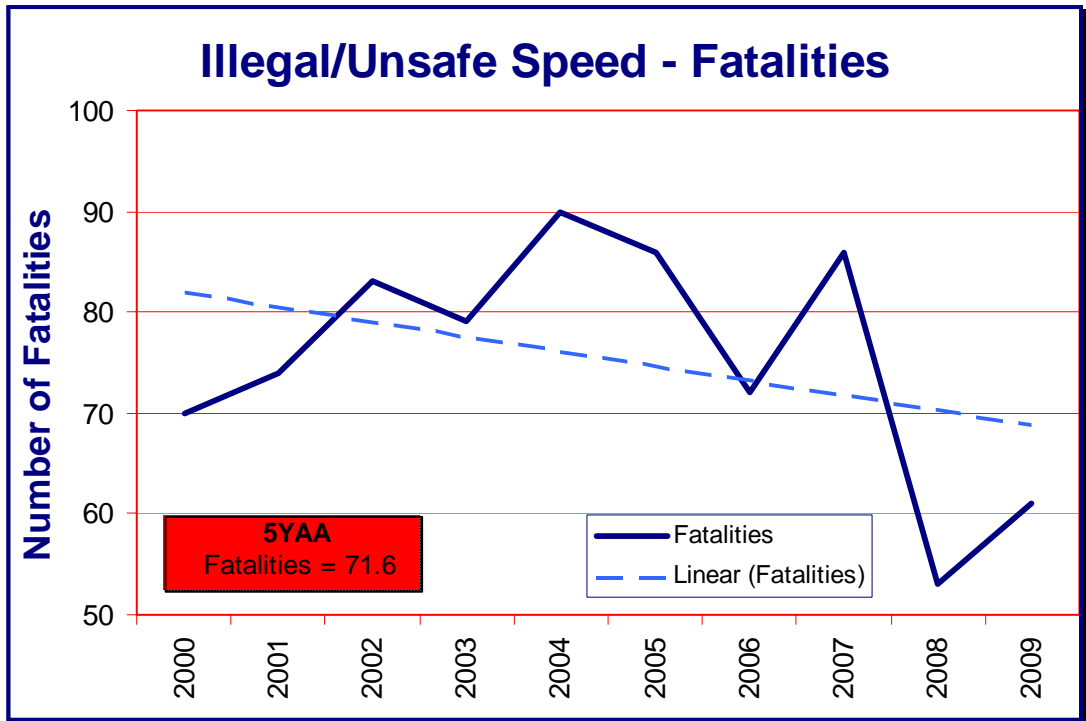
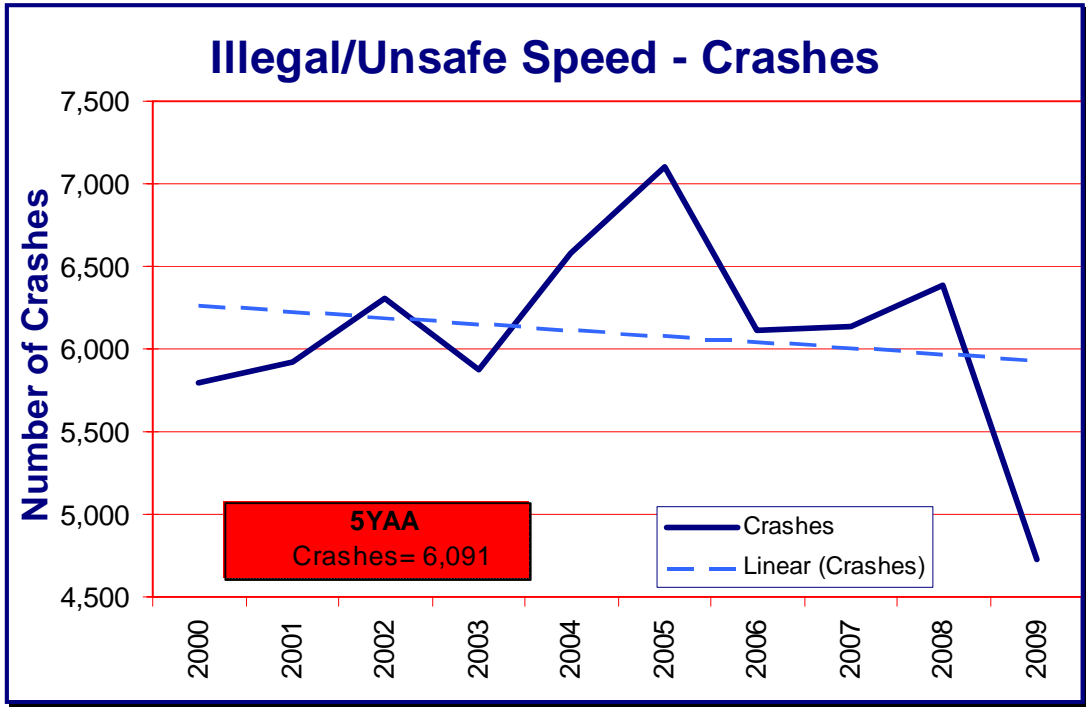


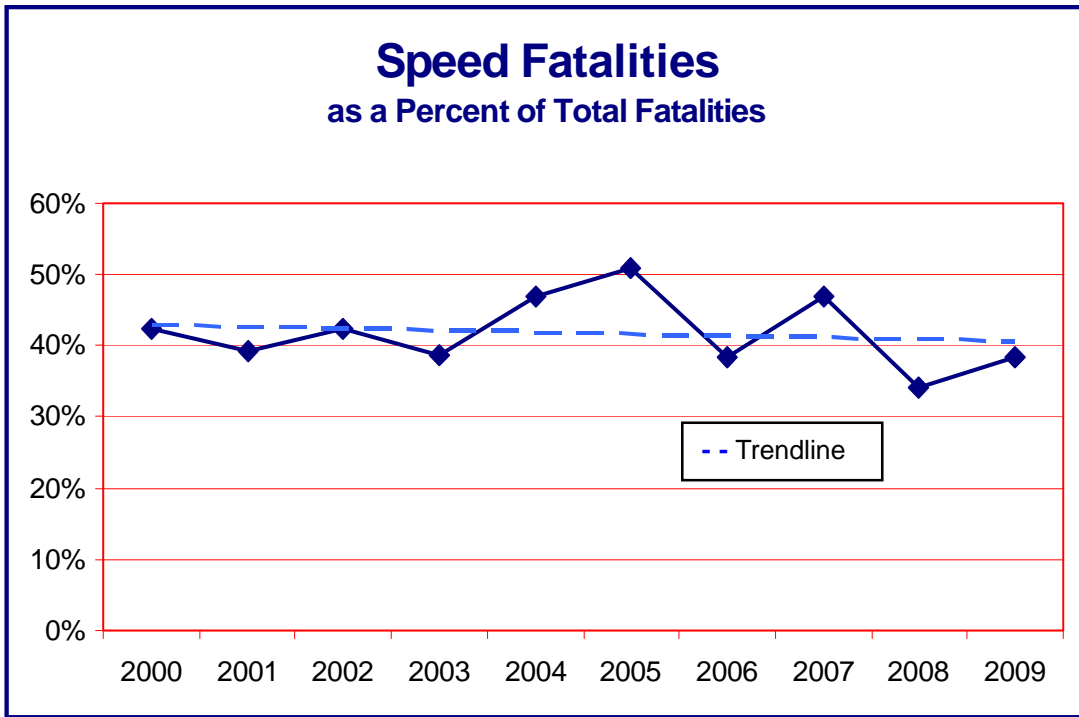
Section B: Illegal/Unsafe Speed

Although overall crash trends are down, crashes resulting from excessive and unsafe speed have not improved as dramatically. Unsafe speed was cited as a factor in an average of 6,100 crashes per year. Speed-related crashes account for 19% of the total crashes and 42% of total fatalities.

This category includes crashes resulting from speed in excess of posted speed limits or occurring when road or weather conditions dictate a lower, more prudent speed.

- Illegal/unsafe speed is the number one contributing factor in fatal motor vehicle crashes in Maine.
- Over the past five years 358 Mainers lost their lives in crashes related to illegal/unsafe speed.
- Excessive speeds not only increase the chances of being in a crash, but increase the severity of crashes.
- Not adjusting speed for weather-related road conditions is a problem. Annually in Maine unsafe speed is noted in an average of 3,500 crashes that occur on snowy, slushy or icy road surfaces and another 700 occur on wet road surfaces.







Section C: Inattention/Distracted Driving



Driver inattention and distraction continues to be a growing concern with the proliferation of driver conveniences including personal electronics and communication devices. Distracted driving is more than just texting and talking on a cell phone. Eating, looking at maps, interacting with passengers and applying cosmetics are just some of the activities that take the driver's visual or mental attention away from the road. Driving is a full-time job, and doing so safely requires a person's full attention.

Maine's Distracted Driver law that became effective on September 12, 2009 includes this definition: "Operation of a motor vehicle while distracted" means the operation of a motor vehicle by a person who, while operating the vehicle, is engaged in an activity:

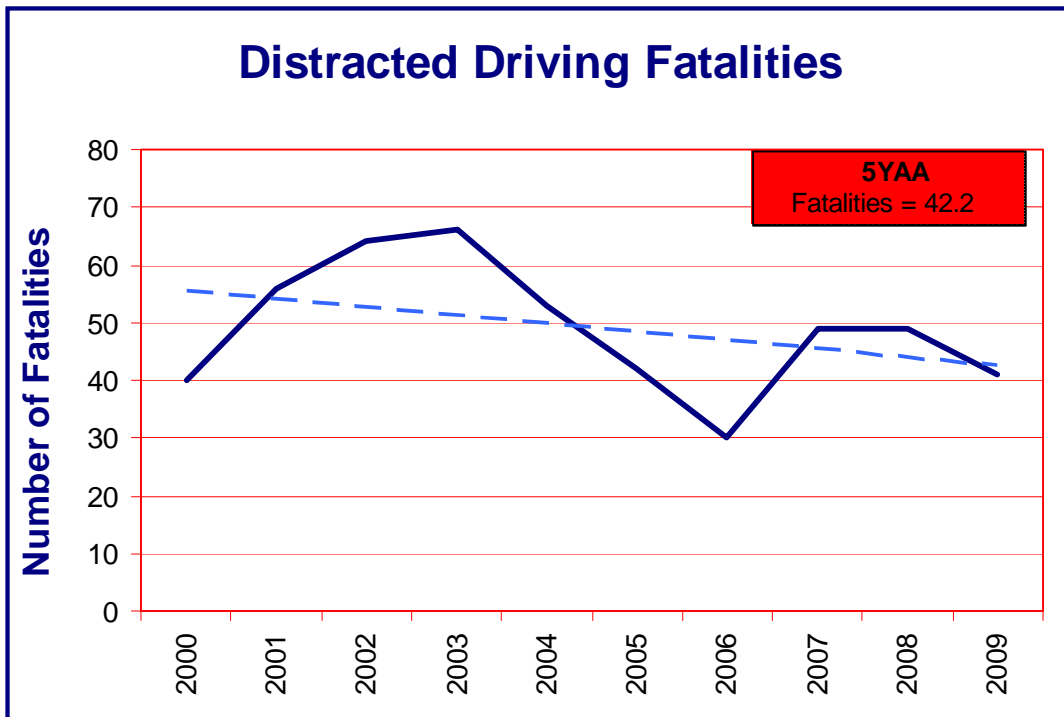
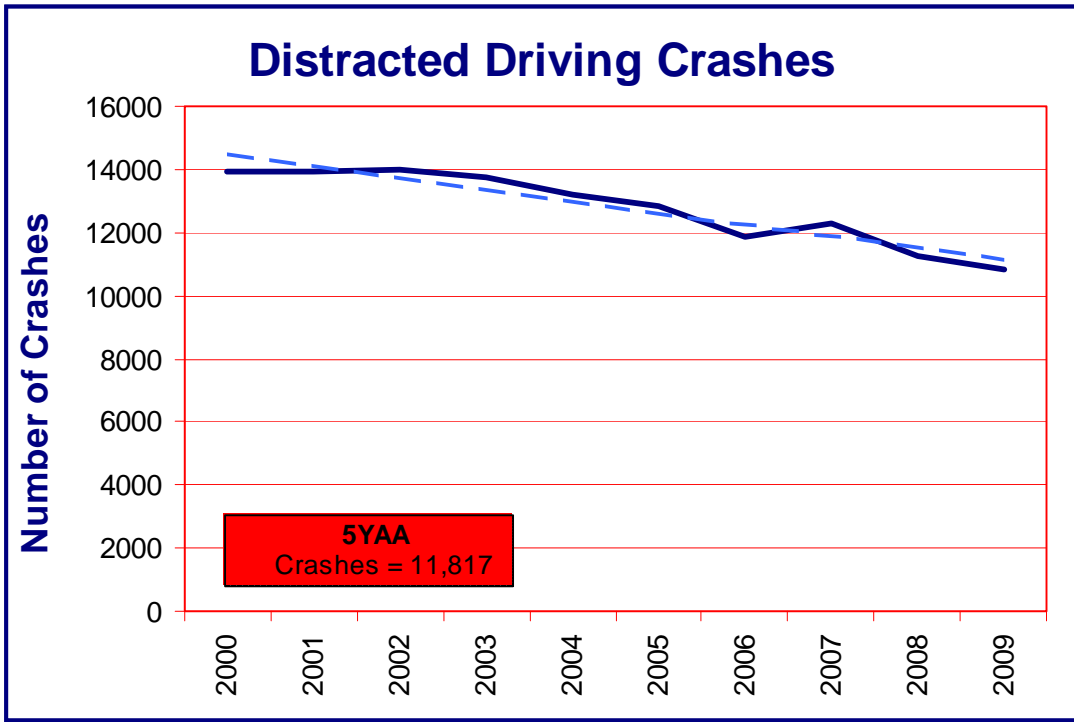
1. That is not necessary to the operation of the vehicle; and
2. That actually impairs, or would reasonably be expected to impair, the ability of the person to safely operate the vehicle.

Statewide

Driving while distracted remains the number one contributing factor in overall Maine police crash reports.

- In 2002 there were 14,000 crashes in Maine attributed to driver inattention or distraction. This number is reported to be under 11,000 crashes in 2009.*

*It is very difficult to collect accurate information about driver distraction at crash scenes because it typically relies on an explanation or admission on the part of the driver that they were, for some reason, distracted. The significant decrease in the number of crashes reported to be caused by distraction or inattention may be a product of drivers becoming more hesitant to admit to this behavior, possibly due to recent media attention of the problem, the perception of potential consequences for these behaviors, and a change in what is seen as socially acceptable.





Section D: Drowsy Driving

Drivers who are fatigued and fall asleep while driving are a problem in Maine. Fatigue can happen on any road, at any time of the day. A person falling asleep behind the wheel of a car is just as dangerous as a person who drives drunk.

National Statistics

According to the National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) 2005 Sleep in America poll, 60% of adult drivers – about 168 million people – say they have driven a vehicle while feeling drowsy in the past year, and more than one-third (37% or 103 million people) have actually fallen asleep at the wheel! In fact, of those who nodded off, 13% say they have done so at least once a month.

Sleep related crashes are most common in young people, especially men, adults with children and shift workers. According to the NSF's 2005 poll:

- Adults between 18-29 years of age are much more likely to drive while drowsy compared to other age groups.
- Men are more likely than women to drive while drowsy and are almost twice as likely as women to fall asleep while driving.
- Adults with children in the household are more likely to drive drowsy than those without children.
- Shift workers are more likely than those who work a regular daytime schedule to drive to or from work drowsy at least a few days a month.
- Sleep deprivation increases the risk of a sleep-related crash; the less people sleep, the greater the risk.
- According to a study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, people who sleep six to seven hours a night are twice as likely to be involved in such a crash as those sleeping eight hours or more, while people sleeping less than five hours increased their risk four to five times.

