

## Thanksgiving week brings driving dangers, according to study

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A Thanksgiving dinner table. Credit: AF.mil

Automobile crashes caused by deer, alcohol and bad weather are more common during the week of Thanksgiving than the rest of the year, according to a recent study of traffic data by The University of Alabama Center for Advanced Public Safety.

During the past five years, crashes during the seven-day holiday period – Thanksgiving and three days before and after – in Alabama have been increasing, according to the CAPS analysis. The 2,482 crashes recorded in 2013 were 22 percent more than in 2009. On average, there were 350 crashes per day during the period over the past five years, according to CAPS.

"With the improvement of the economy and the drop in gas prices, there

is generally an expectation that the number this year will be over 2,500 crashes," said Dr. David Brown, a research associate with CAPS who directed the study.

The study employed the Critical Analysis Reporting Environment, or CARE, a software analysis system developed by CAPS research and development personnel to automatically mine information from existing databases. Crash records for the study were provided by the Alabama Department of Public Safety.

The best safety tip for the week is simply to buckle up. During the past five years, there have been 83 people killed in auto crashes during Thanksgiving week, roughly 16 or 17 fatalities each holiday. Of those 83 fatalities, 68 had the chance to use a seat belt, meaning they were not on motorcycles, bikes or walking. Of those 68 people, about two-thirds, or 46 people, were not wearing a restraint.

Based on Thanksgiving statistics alone, those involved in crashes who failed to buckle up were close to 20 times more likely to be killed, according to CAPS analysis.

"The values of seatbelts are so overwhelming that it is difficult to understand why anyone would not take advantage of their life-saving potential," Brown said.

Besides buckling up, drivers should be aware of the factors that tend to be much more prevalent during Thanksgiving week, such as deer on roadways, weather and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Crashes involving deer are 77 percent more likely during Thanksgiving week than the rest of the year, and crashes where drivers swerved to avoid deer are about 40 percent more likely, according to the study.

The mix of deer and automobiles likely comes from more driving at night during Thanksgiving week since crashes at night are 70 percent more likely during that week than other times of the year. Deer seek food at night, and deer are active this time of year because of the start of hunting season. In 2014, deer season begins Nov. 22 in Alabama, the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

Crashes caused by a driver under the influence of alcohol or drugs are also more prevalent during Thanksgiving week. During the past five years, these crashes were 27 percent more likely, with the crashes concentrated between 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to CAPS.

"Thanksgiving week has the equivalent of at least three Saturdays – Thursday, Friday and Saturday," Brown said. "These might all be thought of as 'party days,' when drinking and driving might come together for those who are irresponsible enough to mix the two."

Another more prevalent cause for collisions is weather. Rain was considered a major factor in about 16 percent more [crashes](#) observed than during the rest of the year. Also, the cause listed as "too fast for conditions" was reported about 12 percent more than at other times, according to CAPS.

"November is typically a dry month, so when it does rain toward the end of the month, there is an accumulation of oil, leaves and other debris on the roadway that can make it deceptively slippery," Brown said.

During the upcoming holidays, traffic safety professionals at CAPS highly recommend the following:

- Always use safety restraints, and make sure everyone in the car uses theirs, even on the shortest of trips.

- Be cautious on newly paved or widened roads where rye grass has been planted for erosion control as deer will herd to these areas. Slow down in these areas and in all rural areas, especially at night. Do not swerve or risk losing control of your vehicle.
- Do not drink and drive or even use the roads during those times when others are more likely to be driving impaired, especially the late night hours. Never ride with anyone who has had any alcohol or drugs. Generally, this also includes prescription pain killers and other drugs that affect physical performance.
- Never drive with cell phone or texting distractions. Anticipate this behavior in others by being perceptive of the actions of all vehicles around you. Get away and stay away from these problematic vehicles.
- Drive with the flow of traffic, and do not exceed the speed limit. A 10-mph reduction in speed of impact cuts your chances of getting killed in a crash in half.
- Avoid being out in inclement weather. Weather has one of the greatest impacts on crash frequency, and CAPS' weather studies have shown crash frequency to increase by at least 40 percent when the pavement is wet.

**More information:** UA's Center for Advanced Public Safety used its own CARE software to analyze the data to obtain the statistics for this article. Try CARE online analysis at [caps.ua.edu/online\\_analysis.aspx](https://caps.ua.edu/online_analysis.aspx).

Provided by University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa

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