

Fatal road crashes substantial compared with leading causes of death

October 1 2015, by Bernie Degroat

America's capital is notorious for gridlock—traffic, that is. But it's also one of the safest places in the U.S. when it comes to road deaths, say University of Michigan researchers.

Michael Sivak and Brandon Schoettle of the U-M Transportation Research Institute found that Washington, D.C., has the fewest road fatalities as a percentage of all deaths—0.4 percent—compared to all 50 states. Its fatality rate from [road crashes](#) of 3.1 per 100,000 population is also the lowest in the nation.

Using 2013 data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U-M researchers compared [fatality rates](#) from road crashes with five leading causes of death—heart disease, cancer, lung disease, stroke and Alzheimer's—for each state and the District of Columbia.

They found that the northern Atlantic seaboard and Pacific states have among the lowest fatality rates from road crashes per 100,000 population and fewest road deaths as a percentage of all fatalities.

In addition to Washington, D.C., states with the best traffic crash death rates include Massachusetts (4.9 per 100,000 population), New Jersey (6.1), New York (6.1), Rhode Island (6.2), Washington state (6.3) and Alaska (6.9).

Likewise, Massachusetts (0.6), Rhode Island (0.7), New Jersey (0.8) and

New York (0.8) join the District of Columbia with the fewest road fatalities as a percentage of all deaths. Connecticut, Maine, Pennsylvania and Maryland in the Northeast; Oregon, Hawaii and Washington state in the West; and Ohio, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin are also in the top third.

On the other end of the spectrum, states in the Northern Rockies and the Dakotas, as well as the South and Southwest, in general, have the most road fatalities as a percentage of all deaths and the highest fatality rates from road crashes per 100,000 population.

Montana leads in both categories with a traffic crash fatality rate of 22.6 per 100,000 people (followed by Mississippi and North Dakota at 20.5) and 2.4 percent road deaths as a percentage of all fatalities (tied with North Dakota and just ahead of Mississippi at 2.0).

Compared to other leading causes of death, [road fatalities](#) are lower, but still quite substantial, the researchers say. Fatalities from road crashes nationwide as a percentage of fatalities from leading causes of death are 5 percent for heart disease, 6 percent for cancer, 22 percent for lung disease, 25 percent for stroke and 39 percent for Alzheimer's.

Several states in the eastern half of the U.S. (both north and south) have the highest fatality rates for heart disease and cancer; those states plus several Great Plains states have among the highest [death](#) rates for lung disease and stroke; and the Midwest, along with a few western states, have the highest mortality rates for Alzheimer's. The West, in general, has the lowest rates for most of these health-related deaths.

Sivak and Schoettle also calculated fatalities from road crashes as a percentage of deaths from [heart disease](#), cancer, lung disease, stroke and Alzheimer's. They found that fatalities from traffic crashes exceed 25 percent of the deaths from [lung disease](#) in 18 states, from stroke in 30

states and from Alzheimer's in 46 [states](#).

Provided by University of Michigan

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