

US car crash deaths down, but still surpass other nations (Update)

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(HealthDay)—Car crash deaths on American roads fell nearly one-third

over a recent 14-year period, but the nation's collision death rate still tops that of other high-income countries, health officials reported Wednesday.

About 90 Americans die in crashes every day. That's the highest roadway death rate among 20 countries examined, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

"It is important to compare us not to our past but to our potential. Seeing that other high-income countries are doing better, we know we can do better, too," said Dr. Debra Houry. She's director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

"People of our nation deserve better and safer transport," she said in a CDC news release.

Crash deaths in the United States fell by 31 percent from 2000 to 2013. In other countries studied, crash deaths declined by an average of 56 percent during the same time, the researchers found. Spain had the greatest reduction in crash deaths—75 percent. The United States had the smallest reduction, according to the report.

Alcohol and a lack of seat belts figured in many of the U.S. deaths, suggesting much more progress is possible, the CDC said.

"We know what works to prevent crashes, injuries and deaths," said Erin Sauber-Schatz, transportation safety team lead at the Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the CDC.

"About 3,000 lives could be saved each year by increasing seat belt use to 100 percent, and up to 10,000 lives could be saved each year by eliminating alcohol-impaired driving," Sauber-Schatz said.

If the United States had the same crash death rate as Sweden—the country with the fewest crash deaths—more than 24,000 U.S. lives could've been saved in 2013. And \$281 million in direct medical costs would've been saved in 2013 if U.S. drivers were as safe as those in Sweden, the researchers noted.

Besides never drinking and driving, the agency said crash deaths can be avoided by using seat belts in both front and rear seats; properly using car seats and booster seats with children through age 8; eliminating distracted driving, and obeying speed limits.

Strategies such as graduated licensing requirements, increased alcohol taxes and campaigns on proper car seat installation also help stem unnecessary traffic deaths, the researchers said.

For the study, the researchers used data from the International Road Traffic and Accident Database for 2000 through 2013.

The United States had the most motor vehicle crash deaths based on population and number of registered vehicles. America ranked second in the percentage of deaths involving alcohol (31 percent) and third lowest in front seat belt use (87 percent), the report showed.

Comparison countries included Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The study results were published July 6 in the CDC's *Vital Signs* report.

More information: CDC report: www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns

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