

Traffic Safety Facts 1997

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration



Alcohol



The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines a fatal traffic crash as being alcohol-related if either a driver or a nonoccupant (e.g., pedestrian) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater in a police-reported traffic crash. Persons with a BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be intoxicated. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

Traffic fatalities in alcohol-related crashes fell by 6 percent from 1996 to 1997. The 16,189 alcohol-related fatalities in 1997 (38.6 percent of total traffic fatalities for the year) represent a 32 percent reduction from the 23,641 alcohol-related fatalities reported in 1987 (51.0 percent of the total).

NHTSA estimates that alcohol was involved in 39 percent of fatal crashes and in 7 percent of all crashes in 1997.

The 16,189 fatalities in alcohol-related crashes during 1997 represent an average of one alcohol-related fatality every 32 minutes.

More than 327,000 persons were injured in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present — an average of one person injured approximately every 2 minutes.

Approximately 1.5 million drivers were arrested in 1996 for driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. This is an arrest rate of 1 for every 122 licensed drivers in the United States (1997 data not yet available).

About 3 in every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives.

In 1997, 30 percent of all traffic fatalities occurred in crashes in which at least one driver or nonoccupant had a BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater. More than 68.5 of the 12,704 people killed in such crashes were themselves intoxicated. The remaining 31.5 were passengers, nonintoxicated drivers, or nonintoxicated nonoccupants.

Table 1. Types of Fatalities in Fatal Crashes Involving at Least One Intoxicated Driver or Nonoccupant, 1997

Type of Fatality	Number	Percent of Total
Intoxicated Drivers	7,003	55
Nonintoxicated Drivers	825	6
Passengers	2,652	21
Intoxicated Nonoccupants (Pedestrians and Pedalcyclists)	1,695	13
Nonintoxicated Nonoccupants	529	4
Total Fatalities	12,704	100

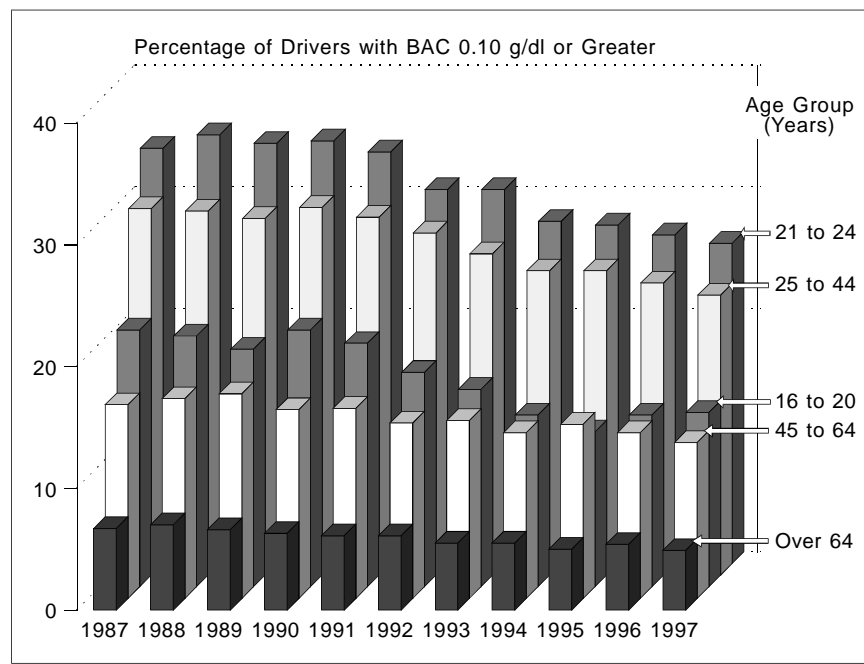
“There were 16,189 alcohol-related fatalities in 1997 — 38.6 percent of the total traffic fatalities for the year.”

The rate of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes is 3.5 times as high at night as during the day (59.8 percent vs. 17.0 percent). For all crashes, the alcohol involvement rate is 4.9 times as high at night (15 percent vs. 3 percent).

In 1997, 29 percent of all fatal crashes during the week were alcohol-related, compared to 52 percent on weekends. For all crashes, the alcohol involvement rate was 5 percent during the week and 12 percent during the weekend.

From 1987 to 1997, intoxication rates decreased for drivers of all age groups involved in fatal crashes. Drivers 16 to 20 years old experienced the largest decrease in intoxication rates (32 percent), followed by drivers over 64 years old (27 percent).

Figure 1. Intoxicated Drivers in Fatal Crashes by Age Group, 1987-1997



“From 1987 to 1997, intoxication rates decreased for drivers of all age groups involved in fatal crashes.”

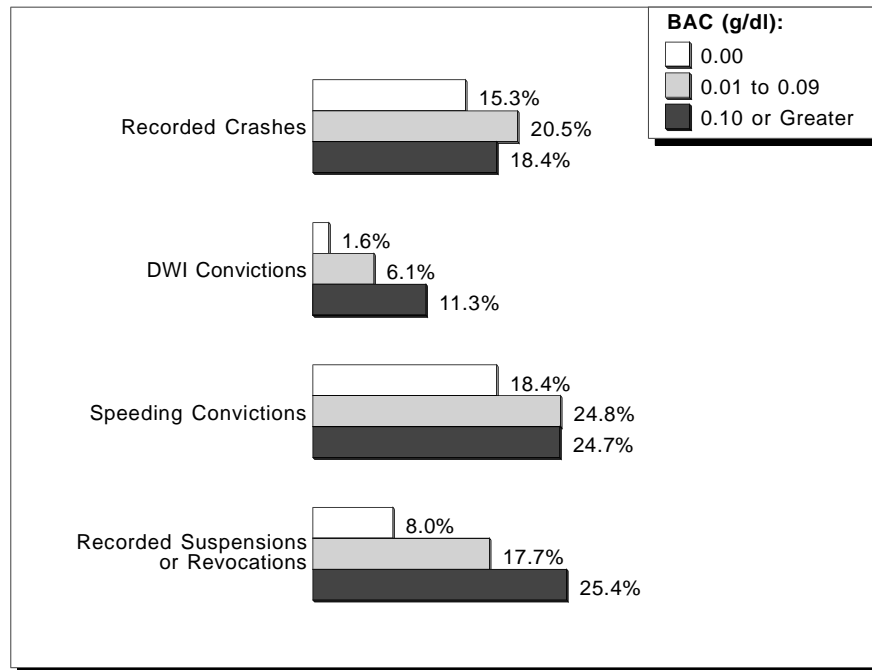
The highest intoxication rates in fatal crashes in 1997 were recorded for drivers 21-24 years old (26.3 percent), followed by ages 25-34 (23.8 percent) and 35-44 (22.1 percent).

Intoxication rates for drivers in fatal crashes in 1997 were highest for motorcycle operators (27.9 percent) and lowest for drivers of large trucks (1.1 percent). The intoxication rate for drivers of light trucks was higher than that for passenger car drivers (20.2 percent and 18.2 percent, respectively).

Safety belts were used by only 18.5 percent of the fatally injured *intoxicated* drivers (BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater), compared to 31.8 percent of fatally injured *impaired* drivers (BAC between 0.01 g/dl and 0.09 g/dl) and 47.5 percent of fatally injured sober drivers.

Fatally injured drivers with BAC levels of 0.10 g/dl or greater were seven times as likely to have a prior conviction for driving while intoxicated compared to fatally injured sober drivers (11.3 percent and 1.6 percent, respectively).

Figure 2. Previous Driving Records of Drivers Killed in Traffic Crashes, by Blood Alcohol Concentration, 1997



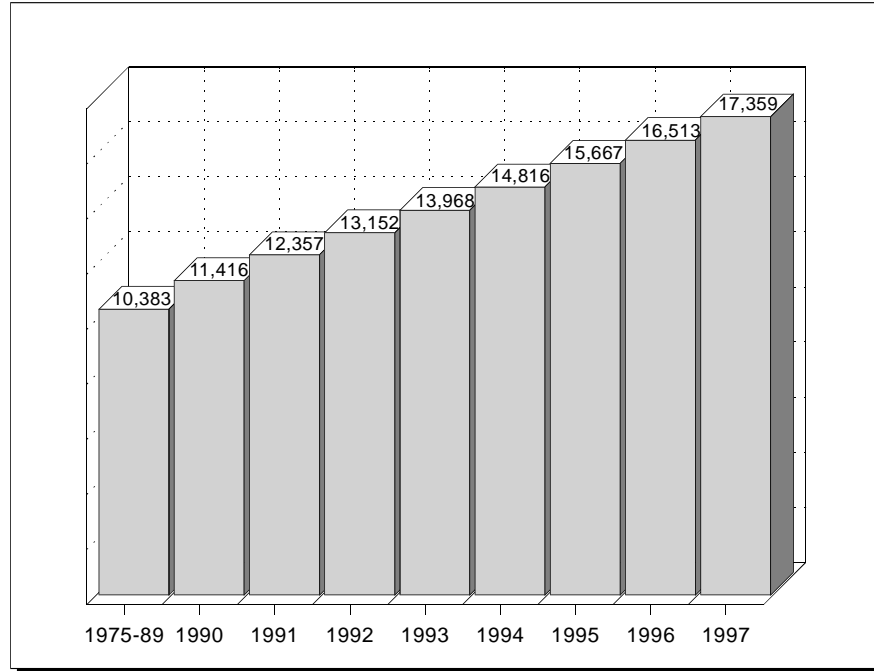
“Nearly one-third of all pedestrians 16 years of age or older killed in traffic crashes in 1997 were intoxicated.”

Nearly one-third (33 percent) of all pedestrians 16 years of age or older killed in traffic crashes in 1997 were intoxicated. By age group, the percentages ranged from a low of 9.3 percent for pedestrians 65 and over to a high of 49.8 percent for those 25 to 34 years old.

The driver, pedestrian, or both were intoxicated in 37 percent of all fatal pedestrian crashes in 1997. In these crashes, the intoxication rate for pedestrians was more than double the rate for drivers — 29.5 percent and 12.5 percent, respectively. Both the pedestrian and the driver were intoxicated in 5.3 percent of the crashes that resulted in a pedestrian fatality.

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 17,359 lives since 1975. In 1997, an estimated 846 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws.

Figure 3. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1997



“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 17,359 lives since 1975.”

On the following pages, Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 present summary data on alcohol involvement in fatal crashes in 1997, compared with 1987 data. Table 6 shows alcohol involvement in fatal traffic crashes by state.

For more information:

Information on alcohol involvement in traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nca>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

Table 2. Alcohol Involvement in Fatal Crashes, 1987 and 1997

	1987		1997		Change in Percentage, 1987-1997
	Number	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater *	Number	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater *	
Fatal Crashes	41,438	40.0	37,280	30.4	-24%
Total Fatalities	46,390	39.9	41,967	30.3	-24%

* For any person (occupant or nonoccupant) involved in the fatal crash.

Table 3. Alcohol Involvement for Drivers in Fatal Crashes, 1987 and 1997

Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes	1987		1997		Change in Percentage, 1987-1997
	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	
<i>Total Drivers</i>					
Total *	61,442	25.0	56,602	17.8	-29%
<i>Drivers by Age Group (Years)</i>					
16-20	9,910	21.0	7,670	14.3	-32%
21-24	8,808	34.1	5,660	26.3	-23%
25-34	16,562	32.9	12,378	23.8	-28%
35-44	9,778	25.4	10,828	22.1	-13%
45-64	9,693	15.9	11,826	12.8	-19%
Over 64	5,078	6.7	6,648	4.9	-27%
<i>Drivers by Sex</i>					
Male	46,884	27.6	40,658	20.3	-26%
Female	13,614	15.0	14,846	10.3	-31%
<i>Drivers by Vehicle Type</i>					
Passenger Cars	36,371	25.1	29,589	18.2	-27%
Light Trucks	14,407	28.7	18,414	20.2	-30%
Large Trucks	5,046	2.7	4,815	1.1	-59%
Motorcycles	4,061	38.2	2,146	27.9	-27%

* Numbers shown for groups of drivers do not add to the total number of drivers due to unknown or other data not included.

Table 4. Alcohol Involvement for Drivers Killed in Fatal Crashes, 1987 and 1997

Driver Fatalities	1987		1997		Change in Percentage, 1987-1997
	Number of Driver Fatalities	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	Number of Driver Fatalities	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	
<i>Total Driver Fatalities</i>					
Total	26,833	37.7	24,644	28.4	-25%
<i>Driver Fatalities by Crash Type and Time of Day</i>					
Single-Vehicle	12,985	53.6	11,533	43.7	-18%
Daytime *	4,234	27.9	4,536	19.4	-30%
Nighttime **	8,485	66.2	6,739	59.7	-10%
Multiple-Vehicle	13,848	22.7	13,111	15.0	-34%
Daytime *	7,671	9.6	8,341	6.1	-36%
Nighttime **	6,162	39.0	4,758	30.7	-21%
<i>Driver Fatalities by Day of Week</i>					
Weekday ***	15,143	29.3	14,726	20.7	-29%
Weekend ****	11,606	48.4	9,843	39.9	-18%
<i>Driver Fatalities by Time of Day</i>					
Daytime *	11,905	16.1	12,877	10.8	-33%
Nighttime **	14,647	54.7	11,497	47.7	-13%
<i>Driver Fatalities by Day of Week and Time of Day</i>					
Weekday ***					
Daytime *	8,594	12.7	9,407	8.5	-33%
Nighttime **	6,468	50.9	5,228	42.1	-17%
Weekend ****					
Daytime *	3,311	25.0	3,470	16.8	-33%
Nighttime **	8,179	57.7	6,269	52.4	-9%

* 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

** 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM.

*** Monday 6:00 AM to Friday 6:00 PM.

**** Friday 6:00 PM to Monday 6:00 AM.

Table 5. Alcohol Involvement for Nonoccupants Killed in Fatal Crashes, 1987 and 1997

Nonoccupant Fatalities	1987		1997		Change in Percentage, 1987-1997
	Number of Nonoccupant Fatalities	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	Number of Nonoccupant Fatalities	Percentage with BAC 0.10 g/dl or Greater	
<i>Pedestrian Fatalities by Age Group (Years)</i>					
16-20	453	34.5	300	28.5	-17%
21-24	478	49.1	253	43.1	-12%
25-34	1,071	53.7	757	49.8	-7%
35-44	840	48.9	922	47.4	-3%
45-64	1,272	37.8	1,189	31.9	-16%
Over 64	1,483	10.8	1,156	9.3	-14%
Total *	6,745	30.7	5,307	29.1	-5%
<i>Pedalcyclist Fatalities</i>					
Total	948	14.2	813	17.3	22%

* Includes pedestrians under 16 years old and pedestrians of unknown age.

Table 6. Traffic Fatalities by State and Highest Blood Alcohol Concentration in the Crash, 1997

State	Total Traffic Fatalities	No Alcohol (BAC = 0.00 g/dl)		Low Alcohol (BAC = 0.01-0.09 g/dl)		High Alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.10 g/dl)		Any Alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.01 g/dl)	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Alabama	1,189	716	60.2	96	8.0	377	31.7	473	39.8
Alaska	77	36	47.2	12	15.2	29	37.7	41	52.8
Arizona	951	518	54.5	86	9.0	347	36.5	433	45.5
Arkansas	660	467	70.8	51	7.7	142	21.6	193	29.2
California	3,688	2,374	64.4	331	9.0	982	26.6	1,314	35.6
Colorado	613	395	64.4	45	7.3	174	28.3	218	35.6
Connecticut	338	186	55.0	36	10.7	116	34.3	152	45.0
Delaware	143	82	57.3	20	14.1	41	28.6	61	42.7
District of Columbia	60	25	41.5	6	10.1	29	48.4	35	58.5
Florida	2,782	1,848	66.4	181	6.5	753	27.1	934	33.6
Georgia	1,577	999	63.4	138	8.8	440	27.9	578	36.6
Hawaii	131	72	55.3	12	8.9	47	35.8	59	44.7
Idaho	259	157	60.4	16	6.2	86	33.4	102	39.6
Illinois	1,395	808	57.9	123	8.8	464	33.3	587	42.1
Indiana	935	627	67.1	52	5.6	256	27.4	308	32.9
Iowa	468	294	62.8	48	10.2	126	27.0	174	37.2
Kansas	481	339	70.5	34	7.1	108	22.4	142	29.5
Kentucky	857	578	67.4	53	6.1	227	26.5	279	32.6
Louisiana	913	492	53.9	96	10.5	326	35.7	421	46.1
Maine	192	128	66.6	9	4.8	55	28.6	64	33.4
Maryland	608	387	63.7	57	9.3	164	27.0	221	36.3
Massachusetts	442	233	52.6	60	13.7	149	33.7	209	47.4
Michigan	1,446	888	61.4	126	8.7	432	29.9	558	38.6
Minnesota	600	407	67.8	32	5.4	161	26.8	193	32.2
Mississippi	861	517	60.0	58	6.7	286	33.3	344	40.0
Missouri	1,192	683	57.3	124	10.4	385	32.3	509	42.7
Montana	265	145	54.7	20	7.7	100	37.6	120	45.3
Nebraska	302	197	65.4	22	7.4	82	27.3	105	34.6
Nevada	347	187	53.8	43	12.4	117	33.8	160	46.2
New Hampshire	125	65	52.3	13	10.3	47	37.4	60	47.7
New Jersey	774	492	63.6	79	10.3	202	26.1	282	36.4
New Mexico	484	264	54.5	47	9.8	173	35.7	220	45.5
New York	1,643	1,194	72.6	115	7.0	334	20.3	449	27.4
North Carolina	1,483	955	64.4	101	6.8	427	28.8	528	35.6
North Dakota	105	55	52.2	4	3.6	46	44.3	50	47.8
Ohio	1,441	965	67.0	92	6.4	384	26.6	476	33.0
Oklahoma	838	536	64.0	62	7.4	240	28.6	302	36.0
Oregon	523	295	56.5	55	10.6	173	33.0	228	43.5
Pennsylvania	1,557	926	59.5	118	7.6	514	33.0	631	40.5
Rhode Island	75	34	45.4	8	10.3	33	44.3	41	54.6
South Carolina	903	585	64.8	45	5.0	273	30.2	318	35.2
South Dakota	148	87	58.7	15	10.0	46	31.4	61	41.3
Tennessee	1,223	727	59.4	90	7.4	406	33.2	496	40.6
Texas	3,510	1,762	50.2	379	10.8	1,369	39.0	1,748	49.8
Utah	366	291	79.4	25	6.8	50	13.7	75	20.6
Vermont	96	62	64.2	8	8.6	26	27.1	34	35.8
Virginia	984	601	61.1	85	8.6	298	30.3	383	38.9
Washington	676	376	55.6	68	10.1	232	34.3	300	44.4
West Virginia	379	233	61.4	17	4.4	129	34.2	146	38.6
Wisconsin	725	396	54.7	64	8.8	265	36.6	329	45.3
Wyoming	137	94	68.5	9	6.6	34	24.9	43	31.5
U.S. Total	41,967	25,778	61.4	3,485	8.3	12,704	30.3	16,189	38.6
Puerto Rico	591	299	50.5	65	10.9	228	38.6	292	49.5