

UPCOMING TRAININGS & CONFERENCES

NDAAs is making its National Courses available virtually in light of health and safety concerns over COVID-19. Check out a full list of NDAAs virtual learning sessions at ndaa.org/training-courses/.

NDAAs Mastering Masking Digital Course/ On Demand Training
ndaa.org/training/mastering-masking-2/

NDAAs Human Trafficking and the Impact on Commercial Driver's Licenses/On Demand Training
ndaa.org/training/human-trafficking-and-the-impact-on-commercial-drivers-licenses/

NDAAs Prosecuting DUI Cases Online Course/ On Demand Training
ndaa.org/training/prosecuting-dui-cases/

NDAAs Auto-Theft Nuts and Bolts: Investigating and Prosecuting the Lone Defendant and the Auto Theft Ring
May 4-5, 2021 @ 11:30 am-4:00 pm (ET)

NDAAs The Hidden Factors of Stalking: Proving your Case with Forensic Analysis
May 11, 2021 @ 1:00-2:15 pm (ET)

NDAAs Threat Assessment for Prosecutors: Protecting the Community from Dangerous Defendants
May 18, 2021 @ 2:00-3:00 pm (ET)

RESOURCES

Impaired Driving Resources
ndaa.org/programs/ntlc/

CDL-Related Resources
ndaa.org/programs/ntlc/commercial-drivers-license/

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In Search of a Vaccine for America's Ongoing Road Safety Epidemic

Uptick in 2020 Traffic Deaths Requires Increased Investment in Proven Countermeasures

By Pam Shadel Fischer, Senior Director of External Engagement, and Russ Martin, Senior Director of Policy and Government Relations, Governors Highway Safety Association

One of the many profound ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted American life is a fundamental shift in how we get around. Despite the drastic changes in travel patterns as millions of people stayed home, causing motor vehicle traffic to drop to historic lows in 2020, the threat of traffic crashes remained high. Last year's 16.5 percent decline in vehicle miles traveled should have translated into fewer deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Unfortunately, the data paint a different picture. Elevated levels of risky driving by some motorists resulted in more deaths per mile driven than in 2019, reaffirming the need for increased national, state and local investment in countermeasures proven to prevent crashes and save lives.

A Deadly Year

2020 was one of the deadliest years in our nation's history. While more than half a million Americans have died from COVID-related complications, preventable traffic crashes also continued to claim lives despite fewer vehicles on the road. Last April, the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) was one of the first national safety organizations to sound the alarm as our members, the state highway safety offices, and their law enforcement partners began reporting a troubling uptick in excessive speeding. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) subsequently released preliminary fatality [data](#) for the first nine months of 2020 confirming that speeding along with other unsafe behaviors were primarily responsible for a 4.6 percent increase in fatalities compared to the same period in 2019. The finding is confounding, considering the dramatic decline in road travel, and frustrating, as it ended what had been a three-year decline in traffic fatalities and stalled the national momentum toward zero deaths.

The NHTSA [analysis](#) also examined the National Emergency Medical Services Information System (NEMSIS) database and found an elevated number of crash ejections, suggesting fewer motorists were buckling up in 2020. At the same time, data from five trauma centers showed an increased presence of drugs and alcohol among serious and fatally injured drivers, which aligns with widespread media reports of increased alcohol and drug sales last year. And travel speed tracking by the Federal Highway Administration also indicated drivers were going faster—not only on highways and freeways. Speeding was rampant on all types of roads.

Drivers were not the only ones at higher risk. Late last month, GHSA released our annual pedestrian safety [spotlight](#) report projecting a dramatic increase in the pedestrian fatality rate for January through June 2020 and a decade-long surge in pedestrian deaths. If this troubling pattern continues for the second half of the year as many traffic safety experts fear, 2020 is projected to have the largest ever annual increase in the U.S. pedestrian fatality rate per mile driven.

How Could This Have Happened?

With most everyone limiting their travel, it stands to reason that less risk exposure equates to improved safety. But a range of unanticipated factors have been at play. Empty roads provided more opportunities for speeding, prompting some drivers to put the pedal to the metal. At the same time, the initial stay-at-home orders in many states not only grounded motorists, but also many traffic enforcement operations, reducing their deterrent effect. This reduction in enforcement was further exacerbated by the death of George Floyd and calls to defund police along with the reallocation of state and local police resources to address protests and COVID-related issues.

The pandemic has also changed travel patterns. Many commuters abandoned public transit for personal vehicles, which prompted a boom in used car sales. Some evidence suggests that motorists who remained on the road tended to be less risk-averse, while the safest drivers were more likely to stay home. Many people switched to travel by bicycle, foot or other non-motorized modes for business or recreation. Meanwhile, the risk factors that continue to threaten non-motorized travelers—lack of infrastructure, larger vehicles, and dangerous driving, now elevated—remained the same.

If there is one bright spot in this otherwise dismal story, the pandemic has shined a spotlight on our nation's other pandemic—traffic crashes—and the need for increased investment in comprehensive traffic safety strategies and proven countermeasures. We have the vaccine for traffic crashes—improved infrastructure coupled with high visibility enforcement, public outreach and timely, high-quality emergency medical response.

Pushing Back

To reverse this trend, many states were able to resume enforcement mobilizations and launch new communications campaigns late last spring. These efforts continue today. However, more must be done to meet this national challenge.

Achieving greater progress in preventing traffic crashes, deaths and serious injuries will require a long-term, comprehensive approach that utilizes all the tools at our disposal. The highway safety community has

leveraged many models to prevent traffic crashes, from the Haddon Matrix and the 4 "E's" of highway safety (engineering, enforcement, education and EMS)—to Vision Zero and the Safe Systems Approach. These multi-disciplinary frameworks require each of us to work collaboratively to address the unsafe behaviors that continue to plague our roads.

Criminal justice and the courts play a central role in addressing the most dangerous drivers. This includes drivers who excessively speed on roadways where countermeasures, such as speed limits and traffic calming features, are ineffective or absent. The pandemic has brought this problem to the forefront and it is imperative that enforcement—both high visibility and automated (speed and red-light safety cameras)—be used to combat this risky behavior.

We must also recommit to ending impaired driving and breaking the deadly cycle of recidivism in this country that claims thousands of lives annually. While some highway safety problems are more responsive to improved infrastructure, impaired driving will always demand criminal justice intervention. That starts by identifying all impairing substances in the offender's system along with what is prompting their use through screening and assessment. Only then can proper treatment be prescribed, and supervision administered that holds the individual accountable for their actions.

Ensuring Equity for All

As we continue to implement enforcement and other criminal justice programs as part of a multi-pronged highway safety strategy, we must also address the persistent and pervasive problem of racial inequity that often plays out in traffic enforcement. The disparate impact of policing on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) is well-documented. Inequitable practices put at risk both lives and public support for law enforcement's demonstrated positive impact on highway safety. GHSA vehemently condemns racism in all its form. In a [statement](#) issued last September, our organization stressed that "race, religion, sexual orientation or any other unique characteristic should never be the reason for a traffic stop, consciously or unconsciously, nor should these characteristics be used to determine who to ticket, who to test, who to search or who to arrest."

COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE VIOLATIONS: ENFORCEMENT, PROSECUTION, & REPORTING



This course is designed to assist prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, judges, court clerks, motor vehicle administrators, and other allied professionals with vested interests in Commercial Driver's License (CDL) enforcement and public safety, overcome the challenges involved throughout all stages of Commercial Motor Vehicle safety enforcement.

CLE credit available

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2021 CDL CONFERENCE
JUNE 22-24, 2021 VIRTUAL
SAVE THE DATE

HOSTED BY: National District
Attorneys Association's
National Traffic Law Center



There have been calls for the divestment of enforcement from highway safety. Some have framed the discussion as a binary choice between unjust enforcement and other safety countermeasures. While GHSA urges reform, we remain steadfast in our support for the proven role of traffic enforcement and the criminal justice system to prevent crashes, deaths and injuries; stop dangerous driving; and hold drivers accountable for poor, often deadly choices. To walk away from enforcement and accountability for those motorists who engage in behaviors that put others at risk is to give up on the countless fatal crashes that we might be able to prevent and on our national goal of zero roadway deaths. That is why GHSA is committed to working with the states and their partners to make reforms and adopt practices that result in greater diversity, equity and inclusion for all roadway users.

Will Vehicle Technology Save Us?

Many point to vehicle technology as the ultimate crash panacea. Will automated and driverless vehicles prevent crashes and save lives? Probably in part, but not for some time. Advancements in technology and design have made crashes more survivable for those inside a vehicle, but pedestrians, bicyclists, scooter riders and motorcyclists remain vulnerable to severe injury when struck by a vehicle.

The auto industry is investing in the development of sophisticated driver assistance and automated vehicle technologies. Widespread use of high levels of automation holds promise for dramatic gains in safety and mobility, but for the foreseeable future deployment will involve technologies that still require human control and thus the risk for human error. Research confirms the positive safety impact of some driver assistance and crash avoidance technologies now available in new vehicles. However, the average age of a vehicle on the road today is 12 years, suggesting a long timeline before there is universal deployment.

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation to require passive alcohol detection and impaired driving prevention technology as standard equipment on all new vehicles. This has the potential to be a game-changer in the battle to stop drunk driving. However, this requirement will only happen after a lengthy federal rule-making process, followed by years of turnover in the vehicle fleet.

All these projects are worthwhile, but we must continue to address the dangerous driving occurring today, tomorrow and in the years ahead, using proven interventions in our toolbox.

A New National Strategy

As we work toward eliminating traffic deaths, there are positive signs coming from the new administration. Recently confirmed U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, whose nomination GHSA strongly supported, has explicitly prioritized safety and equity as part of the Biden Administration's infrastructure plan. Secretary Buttigieg has also built a national media platform that could and should be leveraged to promote the transportation safety issues that all Americans need to understand.

GHSA is a proud founding member of both [Toward Zero Deaths](#) and the [Road to Zero Coalition](#). In January, we joined with hundreds of highway safety partners in signing onto a [letter](#) urging President Biden and his leadership team to commit to reducing traffic fatalities to zero by 2050.

Congress is also preparing to reauthorize all the federal transportation programs, including highway safety. GHSA is urging Congress to make targeted improvements to NHTSA's behavioral grant programs, of which the state highway safety offices are constituents, while also increasing investment in safety across all modes.

The highway safety community includes hundreds of thousands of federal, state and local employees, engineers and planners, law enforcement officials, members of the judiciary, safety and community advocates, researchers, communicators, public health professionals, policymakers, educators, business partners, and more working diligently to save lives. But it will take public- and private-sector leadership at the highest level to champion the change required to achieve dramatic reductions in traffic deaths and to reverse what happened in 2020. There has been much talk about concerted national efforts, but more commitment, investment and action are needed today—lives are on the line.

The Governors Highway Safety Association

The [Governors Highway Safety Association](#) (GHSA) is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy, enhance program management and promote best practices. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans.

About the Authors

Pam Shadel Fischer is the Senior Director of External Engagement for GHSA. She manages many of GHSA's key partnership and external engagements and oversees the association's Consulting Services Initiative, which provides fee-based program and management assistance to state members through a pool of seasoned traffic safety professionals. She researches and writes best practice publications for GHSA (10 to date, addressing teen driving [various topics], pedestrian and bicyclist safety, drowsy driving and high-risk impaired driving) and, through public speaking engagements, implementation of unique partnerships and other outreach, she works to bring national visibility to highway safety.

Fischer has more than 30 years of experience addressing behavioral safety issues at the local, state and national levels through advocacy, education, enforcement, grassroots outreach, policy and planning. After a 20-year career with AAA New Jersey and a four-year run as Governor's Representative and Director of the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety, she established her consulting firm (Pam Fischer Consulting), which for nearly a decade helped state and federal agencies as well as nonprofit organizations address the behavioral safety issues that put all roadway users at risk.

Fischer holds a B.A. in English from Lebanon Valley College, an M.A. in Leadership and Public Administration from Centenary University, where she is also an adjunct professor in the Department of Social Services, and a Certificate in Advanced Management from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also a nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technician.

Russ Martin is the Senior Director of Policy and Government Relations for GHSA. He represents the State Highway Safety Offices before federal agencies and Congress to assist states as they work to address highway safety issues and improve the delivery of federal and state safety programs. Martin also works closely with partner organizations to improve road safety and promote GHSA objectives.

Martin is a national expert on behavioral traffic safety issues and directs GHSA's engagement on emerging vehicle technology. He has managed research projects for GHSA on drugged driving, speeding and automated vehicles. Martin has also spoken in national and local forums and has served as a spokesperson on a variety of traffic safety issues, including distracted driving, pedestrian and bicycle safety, motorcycle safety and first responder safety.

Martin manages the planning of the policy content of GHSA's Annual Meeting. He also plans and serves as a faculty member for GHSA's Executive Seminar for Program Management.

Prior to joining GHSA in 2017, Martin was Manager of State Relations at AAA, where he spent over eight years supporting AAA's network of motor clubs to advocate on behalf of AAA members on traffic safety, vehicle technology and motorists' rights. At AAA, Martin managed a number of special projects, including the "AAA Digest of Motor Laws," research on older-driver safety and the future of transportation.

Martin is a native of Virginia and holds a bachelor's degree in political science from James Madison University.