

Road deaths on steady decline, but more work needs to be done

Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are releasing a comprehensive report on the hundreds of fatal motor vehicle collisions it has investigated throughout the province over the last 10 years.

The majority of fatal collisions on OPP patrolled roads and highways are a result of poor driving behaviour or driver error. When officers investigate fatal collisions in which these factors were found to be present, they record the fatalities and collisions in the categories of driver action, driver condition and use of safety equipment. Four causal factors in collision deaths that are associated with these categories are consistently identified and for that reason, they are known as the 'Big Four': alcohol/drug-related, inattentive-related, speed-related and no seat belt/helmet.

When looking at last year's (2014) data, OPP investigated 265 fatal road crashes which resulted in the deaths of 287 people. Of that, 46 deaths were alcohol/drug-related, 73 were inattentive-related, 61 were speed-related and 50 deaths involved no seat belt/helmet. During the previous year (2013), OPP investigated 251 fatal road crashes which resulted in the deaths of 290 people. Of that, 73 deaths were alcohol/drug-related, 88 were inattentive-related, 47 were speed-related and 71 deaths involved no seat belt/helmet. OPP are pleased to see the numbers down in three of the four major causal factors in 2014. However the one consistency they see every year, without exception, is that the overwhelming majority of fatal road crashes they investigated fall into these four categories and are preventable.

'As we have said before, regardless of how hard the OPP works to reduce the number of lives lost in road collisions, we cannot do this alone,' commented Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair, provincial commander of traffic safety and operational support.

'Ontarians need to understand what we learn from this data, which is that the vast majority of the people who have died on our roads did not have to die.'

'Beginning this year, we are going to publicly share our detailed collision and fatality data because if Ontarians see the extent to which their driving behaviour contributes to road deaths, they will be more aware than ever that they have the strongest influence of all in putting an end to these deaths,' he added.

On occasion, OPP is asked why the Big Four category numbers do not equal the total number of road deaths. The Big Four are not mutually exclusive of each other. A collision can be counted in more than one of the four categories. For example, if an OPP collision investigation reveals that a deceased driver was not wearing a seat belt, was impaired and texting at the time of his/her death, this fatality would be counted in the attentive-related, impaired-related and no seat belt categories. There are other causal factors in collision fatalities that do not fit into the Big Four and make for a higher total value (e.g. animal-related collisions, driver under medical distress).

Traffic safety is one of OPP's core functions and information is one of their most valuable tools. The organization analyzes its fatal collision data every year to help it deploy its resources as effectively as possible, with the aim of reducing the number of deaths on Ontario roads. This is an important goal of OPP's Provincial Traffic Safety Program.

OPP maintains a sophisticated statistics database which captures a wide range of data associated with the fatal motor vehicle collisions it investigates. Through the analysis of this data, police can establish where it needs to focus its provincial enforcement and public education efforts from one year to the next.

Overall, OPP are pleased to see a relatively steady decline in the number of road collision deaths over the last 10 years, including those that fall within the Big Four categories. While OPP, Ontario road users and other road safety partners have much more work to do to make Ontario roads safe, police are encouraged by this downward trend and hope to see it continue.