

Utah road deaths increased 34% during pandemic; nearly 150 deaths so far this year

by Matthew Jacobson, KUTV | Wednesday, June 29, 2022



Two drivers died in a wrong-way crash on I-15 in the early morning of March 12, 2022. (Photo: UHP)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah (KUTV) — Although the COVID-19 pandemic reduced road travel significantly, the number of people who died on Utah roads actually jumped more than one-third from 2019 - 2021.

The staggering numbers look as though they could increase in 2022, as well.

As more residents returned to the road amid waning restrictions, the numbers only got worse, [according to data](#) compiled by a nonprofit transportation research organization.

"America faces a roadway safety crisis, with motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists fatalities in 2021 reaching their highest level in nearly two decades," according to [TRIP](#). "The tremendous toll of fatalities and serious injuries that occur on the nation's roadways are a significant economic and, more critically, personal burden on Americans."

TRIP "researches, evaluates, and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues," according to its website.

The United States had nearly 39,000 traffic deaths in 2019. In 2021, that number had risen to just fewer than 43,000 people killed -- an 19% increase. It's the highest number of road fatalities in the nation since 2005.

Percentage-wise, Utah fared much worse.

In 2019, Utah had 248 traffic deaths. The next year, the fatalities rose to 276. And in 2021, a total of 332 people were killed on Utah roads.

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#), drivers have been engaging in riskier behavior since parts of the nation began to respond to the pandemic.

In an October 2021 report, the NHTSA stated that drivers who remained on the road when others were at home were more likely to drive dangerously, "including speeding, failure to wear seat belts, and driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs."

The report also noted that average speeds continued to increase across America in 2020, and it became more common for vehicles to be traveling at 20 miles per hour or faster.

Pedestrian and bicycle fatalities also increased nationwide.

Though 2022 data is not included in TRIP's report, Utah has already seen firsthand the increase in fatal road incidents and auto-pedestrian crashes. There's been an alarming increase in wrong-way drivers on major highways, and the Utah Department of Public Safety reports [145 people have died](#) in traffic incidents as of June 28.

The gallery of photos at the top of this article show just some of the serious and fatal crashes in Utah during the first half of 2022.

Since 2010, there have been 3,278 roadway deaths in Utah, DPS reports. The majority of those deaths are attributed to people who weren't wearing a seatbelt. The second-leading cause of traffic fatalities over the past 12 years was speeding.

Deadly auto-pedestrian crashes account for 487 deaths over the 12-year period, and distracted driving caused 239 deaths.

In response to Utah's growing number of fatalities, leaders have promised to take action in varying degrees. In Salt Lake City, \$2 million was proposed for "traffic calming" projects like medians and speed bumps. The city recently changed the speed limit from 25 to 20 for neighborhood roads.

The Utah Department of Transportation announced it would be spending more than \$4 million extra each year on safety improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians, and the Utah Highway Patrol said it would be increasing its DUI enforcement.

Law enforcement is upping impaired enforcement specifically during the Independence Day weekend, which is happening during a particularly harsh 100 Deadliest Days. DPS stated more than 90 extra DUI shifts will be worked through the summer.

"Officers will be on high alert, looking to get impaired drivers off the roads," according to a DPS statement.