



Road accident deaths rise in 2021 | local news

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By Calvin Shoemaker | Bristol Herald Courier

Traffic deaths in Virginia rose 16% last year compared to 2019 and are up 19% nationwide, according to a new report from TRIP, a transportation research nonprofit.

The TRIP study also found that in the United States in 2020, traffic deaths were up 8% from 2019, despite an 11% drop in vehicular traffic.

Last year in Virginia, there were 968 total deaths and an average of 161 injured each day, according to data from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

Virginia State Police First Sergeant. MR Willis, the Bristol, Washington County and Scott County district commander, attributes much of the increase in deaths to speed.

“Across the state, speeds have increased dramatically,” Willis said. “We’re seeing triple-digit speeds at an alarming rate more than we’ve ever seen, in my opinion.”

According to Virginia DMV numbers for 2021, 46% of traffic deaths were speed related.

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DMV data in Washington County last year showed eight traffic deaths, three of which were related to unrestricted passengers.

Distracted driving plays another major role in crashes, Willis said.

“There are a lot of things right now that can be distracting for people who are driving,” Willis said. I like to attribute a lot of that to cell phones. People don’t seem to put them down.”

The number of cyclists and pedestrians who die in traffic accidents is also alarming. Just last year, 16 cyclists were killed in Virginia as a result of a road accident, up 23% from 2019, and 125 pedestrians were killed, according to Virginia DMV statistics.

Tripp found that pedestrian and cyclist deaths were responsible for nearly a fifth of road traffic deaths in the United States a year ago.

Willis said a number of factors could play a role in such deaths, including driver negligence, terrain, cell phones, drugs and alcohol. Raising awareness and education about the issue is one way to prevent tragedy, he says, but it is essential that drivers are vigilant and considerate on the road.

“The road is a dangerous place, I don’t care where you are,” Willis said. “We all have to use it together, we have to respect each other and try to keep each other safe, and some don’t.”

Staying calm on the road and taking your time is something all drivers can do to make a difference.

“I tell people to give them plenty of time to get to your destination,” Willis said. “Give yourself some time to stop and take a break when you’re feeling down on the road to reduce the amount of road rage that’s going on.”