

## Traffic fatalities since the pandemic rises again

FRONT PAGE



[Alex Gladden](#)

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The number of traffic deaths in Alabama has risen 6% over the past several years, a national transportation research nonprofit reported.

In Alabama, 989 people died in vehicle crashes in 2022, up 6% from 2019, according to TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit. Traffic fatalities numbered 983 in 2021, 934 in 2020 and 930 in 2019.

Nationally, traffic deaths increased 19% from 2019 to 2022, from 36,096 to 42,795.

The Alabama Legislature has passed laws to protect motorists. In 2023, lawmakers prohibited the use of hand-held telecommunications devices while driving. In 2021, lawmakers passed a law "prohibiting the use of left lanes on interstate highways to vehicles that have not completely passed another vehicle within 1.5 miles," according to TRIP's news release. The Legislature in 2021 also approved doubling fines to \$250 for traffic violations in work zones.

In early 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation created the National Roadway Safety Strategy to address the rise in traffic fatalities since the pandemic. The plan was designed to educate people, design roads that mitigate human mistakes, support safer vehicles, encourage slowing speed limits and help people after crashes.

"The approaches to transportation safety that got us to this point are clearly not delivering the impact they once did," said Jake Nelson, the AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research, in the news release. "With record-setting investment in our nation's transportation system, we have a real-time opportunity to leverage it to turn the tide on traffic deaths and serious injuries among road users."

Lawmakers can also reduce fatal crashes by investing in roadway safety improvements.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety created a report in 2017 that showed the nation has a "\$146 billion backlog in needed roadway safety improvements," according to the news release. The report found that improving roadway safety would save about 63,700 lives and lower the number of serious injuries as a result of traffic crashes by about 350,000 over 20 years.

"Making a commitment to eliminating fatal and serious injuries on the nation's roadways will require robust investment and coordinated activities by transportation and safety-related agencies in providing the needed layers of protection for the nation's motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, including safe road users, safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speeds and high-quality post-crash care," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director.

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### 'We will never forget his sacrifice'



The body of Bibb County Deputy Brad Johnson arrives at the University of Montevallo Student Activity Center for the visitation and funeral service on July 6, 2022. GARY COSEY JR./THE TUSCALOOSA NEWS

### State will pay \$1M settlement to family of deputy shot in line of duty

Hadley Hittson Montgomery Advertiser | USA TODAY NETWORK

On June 30, 2022, Bibb County Deputy Brad Johnson died after sustaining a gunshot wound to the head in the line of duty.

Just after the one year anniversary of his death, the state of Alabama has agreed to pay a \$1 million settlement to Johnson's estate, including his two young daughters. This is the maximum amount of damages allowed under state law, and the settlement addresses allegations around the circumstances that led to Johnson's death.

"Fundamental flaws in Alabama law granting correctional incentive 'good time' to inmates failed Deputy Johnson and his family," Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement on Wednesday. "Alabama stands behind our law enforcement personnel and we must do all we can to ensure they are afforded every protection under the law to safely do their jobs."

Johnson was 32 years old when a fleeing suspect in rural Bibb County fired at him and his partner, Deputy Chris Poole. That suspect was identified by law enforcement as Austin Patrick Hill, a 27-year-old Shelby County man who had previously been convicted of several felonies. After Johnson and Poole were shot, other law enforcement officers engaged in a 10-hour-long manhunt to arrest Hill.

Since his teens, Hill has faced at least 46 criminal charges. In one instance in 2009, Hill escaped from a work release center in Camden where he was serving time for second-degree theft of property.

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Bibb County Sheriff's Deputy Brad Johnson is seen with his canine partner Rodeo in this updated photo. PROVIDED BY BIBB COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

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In early 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation created the National Roadway Safety Strategy to address the rise in traffic fatalities since the pandemic.

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### Study: Water from many faucets in US contains PFAS

John Fleisher Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — Drinking water from nearly half of U.S. faucets likely contains "forever chemicals" that may cause cancer and other health problems, according to a government study released Wednesday.

The synthetic compounds known collectively as PFAS are contaminating drinking water to varying extents in large cities and small towns — and in private wells and public systems, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

Researchers described the study as the first nationwide effort to test for

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