

Everyone can slow down': Traffic fatalities on the rise in Oklahoma

by Mckenzie Richmond, KTUL Staff | Tuesday, July 11th 2023



'Everyone can slow down': Traffic fatalities on the rise in Oklahoma. (KTUL)

TULSA, Okla. (KTUL) — The chance of being killed in a traffic crash in Oklahoma grew by 15% between 2019 and 2022.

Vehicle travel only increased by 1%.

“Over 700 people annually being killed in traffic crashes in Oklahoma,” Rocky Moretti, the director of policy and research with TRIP, said.

So, what’s the reason for the exponential increase?

“There’s high numbers of drug and alcohol related fatalities, and speed related fatalities,” Paul Madden, TPD traffic safety coordinator, said.

Research also suggests the pandemic played a part.

“Research has shown is that really since the beginning of the pandemic, that we’ve seen a significant increase in risky behavior by motorists,” Moretti said. “We’re seeing increased levels of speeding, of impaired driving, of distracted driving, and of motorcyclists, fewer motorcyclists wearing helmets. When you put this all together along with aggressive driving.”

Risky road behavior can not only cost a life, but billions of your tax dollars, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

“It totals an \$18 billion cost to the public in Oklahoma,” Moretti said. “The economic cost which is just the lost productivity, healthcare costs, property damage in Oklahoma was \$4.5 billion. And then the additional estimate for the lost quality of life. If a member of your family was killed, if someone in your family or yourself was seriously injured, so that really altered your life moving forward. If you look at what are those quality of life cost, the estimate was nearly \$14 billion in Oklahoma last year.” Madden says there’s three ways address traffic problems. “Education, enforcement and engineering,” Madden said. It’s critical that our state transportation agencies have adequate resources to improve the roads, but inflation has slowed improvements.

“In Oklahoma, increase in inflation was 28%,” Moretti said. “So that’s really been a challenge in terms of taking those additional resources and translating it to transportation improvements.”

Moretti and Madden agree, it all starts with the driver. So far, TPD has written over 40,000 traffic citations and reports 23 traffic fatalities to date.