

To *Your* HEALTH *Fresno County*

Bringing you public health issues and ways to improve personal, family, neighborhood and community health



Traffic Fatalities

July 29, 2015

It is tragic that seldom a week goes by without a Fresno County traffic related fatality. In Fresno County in 2013, 149 people died in traffic associated accidents. ¹

Fresno County is not alone. A fatal motor vehicle accident (MVA) occurs on average every 12 minutes in the United States. ² In California in 2013, 3000 individuals died from such accidents (this included 447 motorcyclists, 701 pedestrians, and 141 bicyclists.) ³

MVAs are the second leading cause of shortened lifespan in the United States for both males and females and MVAs continue to be the leading cause of death and injury for Americans age 1 to 34. ^{4,5}

According to [Vision Zero](#), a multi-national road traffic safety project, "For some reason we seem to be more tolerant of death if it happens on the roads," but really, "there is no moral justification for any loss of life in traffic." ⁶

Since the 1980s, fatalities and injuries per mile driven have dropped by nearly 80% due to improvement in highway and vehicle design and with implementation, enforcement, and education with regard to seat belt laws and anti-drunk driving laws. ⁵

We can, and must, reduce the number of MVA deaths in Fresno County. Each driver must embrace and act on the California Office of Transportation Safety assertion, "toward zero deaths, every 1 counts." ⁷

Causes of MVAs may be:

- Driver Related
 - [Speeding](#)
 - [Alcohol or drug impairment](#)
 - [Distraction](#)
- Vehicle Related
 - Tire failure

- Brake malfunction
- Roadway Related
 - Slick surfaces
 - Obstruction of driver vision

[Deaths from MVAs are increased by improper driver and passenger restraint.](#)

The Pillars of Public Health have power to fulfill [my fourth wish for public health in Fresno County](#), that of reducing MVA death and injury to zero.

Individuals and Families: We must consider that EVERY time we step behind the wheel of a moving vehicle, we run the risk of killing or seriously injuring ourselves, a loved one, or other persons, and tragically affecting the lives of many.

With this in mind, we must:

- Consider using other means of transportation when possible (which will also improve our health and the quality of our air.)
- Be mindful of bicycle and pedestrian safety including properly fitting helmets, lights and reflectors, and using caution at street crossings.
- When we do drive, focus only on the task of driving and put away ALL distractions such as cell phones.
- Not allow ourselves or others to drive impaired by alcohol, drugs, medications, fatigue, or perceptual or cognitive deficits.
- Ensure that everyone in our vehicle is properly restrained, especially children and infants.
- Obey the posted and recommended speed limits and traffic signage.
- Properly maintain our vehicles, regularly checking wheel alignment, tire wear and air pressure, and brakes.

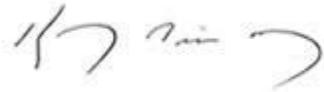
Educators, Health Care Providers, and Employers: We must ensure that our students, patients, and employees are regularly reminded of the behaviors listed above.

Community Leaders and Public Officials: We must promote the use of alternative modes of transportation and encourage public awareness campaigns. We must promote and offer incentives for compliance with correct seat belt and car seat use, as well as fully, and fairly, monitor and enforce speed limit, seat belt use, and DUI laws. We need to promote public policy on graduated licensing for younger drivers and encourage the use of license evaluation to identify perceptual and cognitive deficits in older drivers. Finally, we must modify the physical environment (road design, signs, speed limits, etc.) based on analysis of available data to increase safety.

Let us together strive for a Fresno County where deaths from MVAs cease to exist.

I encourage you to send me your thoughts and ideas on personal and community health in Fresno County. E-mail me at ToYourHealth@co.fresno.ca.us.

Here's to your health!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Bird", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Health Officer

Citations:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention WONDER, 2015
2. <http://www.consoleandhollawell.com/law-blog/15-astonishing-facts-you-didnt-know-about-car-accidents/>
3. <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/general-statistics/fatalityfacts/state-by-state-overview>
4. <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/foundation-health-measures/General-Health-Status>
5. http://www.prevent.org/data/files/transportation/pages%20from%20transportation%20and%20health_%20policy%20final%2007082011%20chapter%203.pdf
6. <http://www.visionzeroinitiative.com/>
7. http://www.ots.ca.gov/OTS_and_Traffic_Safety/About_OTs.asp