



Traffic Deaths and Injuries Plummet in 2009

Written On September 13, 2010 By Bob Kraft

There was a surprising and very welcome drop last year in traffic deaths and injuries across the nation. Unfortunately, the primary cause of that drop may have simply been the poor economy — people aren't driving as much as they did in previous years, other than going back and forth to work. An article in the [Los Angeles Times](#) mentions other reasons though. Here are excerpts:

In 2009, the rate of traffic deaths and injuries in the U.S. reached its lowest point in nearly 60 years, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced Thursday.

Although Americans drove slightly more than in 2008, traffic deaths were down 9.7% in 2009 and at their lowest number since 1950. The number and rate of injuries were the lowest recorded since 1988, when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration first began estimating injury data. Motorcycle fatalities also declined for the first time in 11 years.

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Alcohol-related fatalities dropped 7.4%, but NHTSA Administrator David Strickland noted that drunk driving was still a factor in about one-third of the more than 30,000 traffic deaths each year.

“We will continue to work with our state partners to strictly enforce both seat-belt use and anti-drunk-driving laws across this nation, every day and every night,” Strickland said in a statement.

Joan Claybrook, president emeritus at the nonprofit advocacy group Public Citizen, said the poor economy explained the lower death and injury rates.

“When the economy is down, discretionary driving drops substantially,” Claybrook said. “The people who are doing the driving are going to work. They’re much more serious and more careful.”

Improvements in car designs might be another factor, Claybrook said, noting that manufacturers now build SUVs that are lower to the ground, making them more resistant to rollovers, which can be particularly deadly.

But an improved economy could disrupt the downward trend.

“Unfortunately, when the economy gets better, those deaths and injuries will go back up,” Claybrook said.