

States Lack Key Laws That Would Offer Protections on Highways

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TOO FEW states have adopted essential, lifesaving highway safety laws such as seat belt and booster seat use and teen driving restrictions, according to a report that outlines 15 key traffic safety laws that all states should enact to protect health.

Released by the group **Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**, the February report cites 2006 statistics showing 42,640 people died in motor vehicle crashes, and more than half of them were unrestrained. Motorcyclist deaths continued to climb dramatically for the ninth consecutive year, reaching a record 4,810. And motor vehicle crashes were once again the leading cause of death for people ages 4-34.

"For elected officials, government leaders and policy-makers, there are not acceptable excuses for delaying and dithering," **Judith Lee Stone**, president of **Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**, wrote in the report's introduction. "We know that the proven public health solution to preventing motor vehicle crashes, saving lives and reducing serious injuries is the enactment of strong and cost-effective traffic safety laws."

According to the report, 24 states lack primary enforcement safety belt laws, 30 need a comprehensive motorcycle helmet use law, 12 lack booster seat laws and many states do not have the recommended impaired driving laws.

Among the 15 recommended laws outlined in the report are those that provide for a graduated licensing system to allow teenagers to learn to drive under lower risk conditions. The system consists of a learner's stage, an intermediate stage and an unrestricted driving stage.

A number of impaired driving laws are included in the 15 recommendations, including those that call for mandatory blood alcohol level testing for any driver who was killed or who survived a car crash, more severe punishment for impaired drivers with a blood alcohol concentration well over the legal level, repeat offender laws and laws giving law enforcement officials the authority to set up sobriety checkpoints.

Among those important safety efforts are booster seat laws for children ages 4-8, according to the report. In 2006, nearly 50,000 children were injured in motor vehicle crashes, and 444 children ages 4-7 died. And even though booster seats can substantially reduce such risk to children through age 7, in 2003 only 19 percent of children in that age group were using them.

"**The 2008 Roadmap to State Highway Safety Laws**" is online at www.saferoads.org.

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