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Maine Bureau of Highway Safety Releases Preliminary Motor Vehicle Fatality Numbers for 2023

Augusta, ME — Today the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety releases preliminary data showing that the 134 fatalities that occurred on Maine roadways in 2023 was the lowest number of fatalities since there were 131 fatalities in 2014. Prior to 2014, we had not seen fatality numbers this low since there were 119 in 1944. Highway Safety Director Lauren Stewart, says “ Though this is a vast improvement over the prior several years, the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety recognizes that there is still plenty of work to be done because one life lost is one too many.”

The Maine Bureau of Highway Safety is stepping up efforts by increasing our media messaging to the public about safe driving behaviors. We are continuing to identify and work with communities that are either underserved or overrepresented in crash data. We have also added a requirement for law enforcement agencies that are receiving certain grant funds from us to educate the public on safe driving behaviors and the risks of impaired driving, speeding, and not wearing a seatbelt.

According to the 2023 Maine Seatbelt Use Survey, 94.5% of motorists observed on Maine roadways were using their seatbelt during the daylight hours. This is the highest observed rate thus far. However, the same cannot be said about observed seatbelt usage during the nighttime hours. That number dropped to 77.5% which was the lowest observed nighttime rate in 12 years. In 2023, 60% of the motor vehicle occupants that were killed on Maine roads were not wearing their seatbelt. Due to this, the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety is awarding grant funding to law enforcement agencies to conduct nighttime seatbelt enforcement in order to combat this alarming trend.

One area of noted improvement in 2023 over prior years was the sharp decrease in the number of motorcycle fatalities. The 17 motorcycle fatalities were a 47% decrease from the 32 motorcycle fatalities we saw in 2022. It was also a notable improvement over 2021's 21 fatalities, 2020's 29 fatalities, 2019's 27 fatalities, and 2018's 23 fatalities.

In fact, it was the lowest number of motorcycle fatalities since 2014 when we had 10 fatalities. Though there was a very high number of rainy days during the 2023 motorcycle riding season, we, along with our partners at the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles and Maine Department of Transportation, continued our efforts throughout the year in the area of motorcycle safety.

Buckle Up. Drive Safely.



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An area we did not see improvement in, unfortunately, was the number of pedestrian fatalities. In years past, we would see one year with a higher number of pedestrian fatalities, followed by a sharp decrease the next year, followed by an increase again. However, since 2021, we have had 20 or more pedestrian fatalities per year. We have recognized this trend and have increased our efforts in media messaging, awarding grant funds to law enforcement agencies so they can conduct overtime enforcement activities in pedestrian safety, and adding pedestrian safety education requirements to those grants. Additionally, the Maine DOT recently concluded a Vulnerable Road User Assessment and will be working closely with communities to implement strategies directed toward pedestrian safety.

While it is too early to know how much impaired driving impacted 2023's fatality numbers since toxicology information is still being received, an average of nearly one-quarter (23%) of the fatalities each year from 2018 to 2022 were under the influence of alcohol. This does not account for those that were under the influence of drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol. Just like with seatbelt safety, our partners in law enforcement will be stepping up their enforcement efforts in order to curb this dangerous behavior.

Finally, while we recognize there is continued work to be done in our collective efforts to lower the number of traffic fatalities on Maine roadways, we continue to thank all of our partners in traffic safety and commend all Maine drivers for their part in a commitment to safety to make Maine roadways safer for everyone in 2023 than they have been in many years.

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