

Massachusetts traffic deaths drop 16 percent in 2008

By Martin Finucane, The Boston Globe Staff

The number of traffic deaths in Massachusetts dropped 16 percent, from 434 in 2007 to 363 in 2008, following a national trend, federal highway safety officials said this week.

Nationally, the number of deaths for 2008, 37,261, was down 9.7 percent from 2007, dropping to the lowest level since 1961.

The rate of fatalities per miles traveled also declined, to 1.27 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, a drop of about 7 percent from 2007, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Thursday.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said in a statement that the country had made major advances in areas such as increasing seat belt use, cutting impaired driving, and improving vehicle safety, but "we still have a long way to go."

The federal officials said early data for the first quarter of 2009 indicated that the declining trend was continuing nationally.

In Massachusetts, Middlesex County and Worcester County were the counties with the highest number of traffic deaths, with each of them registering 56, or 15 percent of the total.

The number of alcohol-related crash fatalities declined 20 percent, from 155 in 2007 to 124 in 2008, a 20 percent decrease.

A spokesman for the state Executive Office of Public Safety and Security said the declining fatality rate was the result of a "simple but disciplined approach" by the state.

"Enforcement has been stepped up to include sobriety checkpoints throughout the state to get drunk drivers off our roads," Terrel Harris said. He also said the state's driver education efforts were making roads safer "because we believe an educated driver is a safer driver."

Fatalities (All Crashes)

