Traffic fatalities continue to drop says ODOT

According to preliminary figures released by the Oregon Dept. of Transportation, 2002 was one of the safest years on Oregon's roads and highways since Dwight Eisenhower was president.

For only the second time since 1956, Oregon posted an annual traffic fatality total of less than 430.

This year's total of 426 deaths continues the state's trend of record reductions in traffic fatalities during the past four years. Prior to 1999, the average yearly total back to the 1960s was more than 500 deaths, including three years with more than 700 fatalities.

"We are encouraged, but we cannot celebrate because even with the reduction, 426 people lost their lives," said Troy E. Costales, of ODOT.

"This reduction does indicate that our efforts are making a difference," he said. "Individuals and organizations including ODOT, law enforcement and community volunteers share in this success," he said.

"When you consider that the state population has doubled, and vehicle travel has increased vastly since 1956, it is remarkable to think that the fatality total is back down to that historic level."

Besides the physical and emotional toll on crash victims and their families, there is a financial effect.

"Each traffic fatality costs an av-

erage of \$1 million in lost wages, lost productivity and costs associated with the crash and death," Costales said. Each traffic-crash injury costs an average of \$50,000 in lost productivity, medical bills, rehabilitation and other costs, he said.

Costales said that no single factor could be credited with the record decrease in traffic deaths. He cited a combination of factors including: tough laws for driving-under-theinfluence-of-intoxicants offenders, graduated driver licensing for teenagers, high rates of seatbelt use, law enforcement efforts, public education efforts and a variety of programs each aimed at reducing a specific type of dangerous behavior.



