

Worst April in five years for traffic fatalities, reports ODOT

Gov. Ted Kulongoski declared May as Transportation Safety Awareness Month in Oregon. The annual event has taken on added importance as safety officials work to reverse an alarming trend of increased traffic fatalities this spring.

"This was the worst April in five years for traffic fatalities in Oregon," said Troy E. Costales, manager of the ODOT Transportation Safety Division.

Preliminary crash data point to increases in the following types of fatal crashes:

*More than twice as many men were killed than women.

*Seven fatal crashes are confirmed to speed related.

*Ten fatalities occurred when the occupant was not wearing a safety belt, and six of those

were killed as a result of being ejected from the car.

*Almost 70 percent were on rural roadways.
*The age range of the deceased was 8 to 85.

Costales said flexible grant monies and education efforts will be channeled toward specific safety issues identified. Last year, a similar analysis led to the successful targeting of pedestrian safety issues.

In April 2002, a total of 20 people lost their lives in Oregon traffic crashes. This April, 41 people were killed.

"Up until April, Oregon's 2003 traffic death count was significantly below last year's," Costales said. "From January through March, we were 15 percent to 20 percent below the previous year to date. There were so many fatal crashes this April that the total for the year to

date is now 4 percent above last year. This is simply unacceptable."

May signals the beginning of the highway construction season, increased highway travel, proms and some graduations.

From May through the remainder of the year, traffic deaths historically have increased from fewer than one per day to more than one per day.

In an effort to combat the expected increase in serious traffic crashes, ODOT takes part in a number of activities and educational efforts during May.

This year, special emphasis will be given to the Click It or Ticket national seatbelt campaign, the Work Zone Memorial for people killed in highway work zones, Motorcycle Safety Week and Pedestrian Safety Week.

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