

State pinpoints county's most dangerous roads

Highways 101 and 30 have had the most fatal crashes in Clatsop County over the past decade

By Kyle Spurr
EO Media Group

U.S. Highway 101 and U.S. Highway 30 are the deadliest roads in Clatsop County.

The two routes have accounted for 39 fatal accidents in the past 10 years, according to data from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The data allows the state to pinpoint and prioritize stretches of roadway that may be problematic. The department is then better able to funnel money to roadways with the most crashes for safety improvement projects.

According to Department of Transportation spokesman Lou Torres, "We really have to know if there is an intersection or stretch of road we need to work on or improve for safety reasons."

Last year, the department identified a nearly 7-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 101 from Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center to Surf Pines Lane as a priority safety improvement project.

Speed and inattention

The data, recorded from 2004 to 2014, shows a total of 68 fatal accidents in Clatsop County, resulting in 77 deaths. The numbers are slightly higher than neighboring Columbia and Tillamook counties.

The majority of fatal accidents in Clatsop County were caused by drivers traveling too fast for conditions and straddling or crossing the centerline. The data does not list alcohol or drugs as influences in the crashes.



Jim Mendenhall, owner of Triangle Towing, upends a 2006 Ford Escape that came to rest on its roof after nosediving into the Dairy Queen parking lot in Gearhart in December 2014. The driver survived the crash.

U.S. Highway 101 saw 22 deaths from 20 accidents, while U.S. Highway 30 had 21 deaths from 19 accidents. U.S. Highway 26 had the third highest fatality rate, with 15 deaths from 11 accidents.

A total of five fatal accidents occurred on county roads and three happened on city streets in Cannon Beach and Seaside.

Clatsop County Sheriff's Deputy Paul Williams said speed and inattention play significant factors in crashes, along with a lack of patience on the part of drivers.

A driver's frustration can lead to crossing the centerline, or driving too fast for conditions.

"The sad fact of the matter is it's the same reasons we have been dealing with for decades," Williams said. "The one change we have probably seen over the last couple of decades is the lack of restraints was much

more prevalent than it is today."

New seatbelt laws and advancements in the construction of vehicles have helped curb fatal crashes, he said.

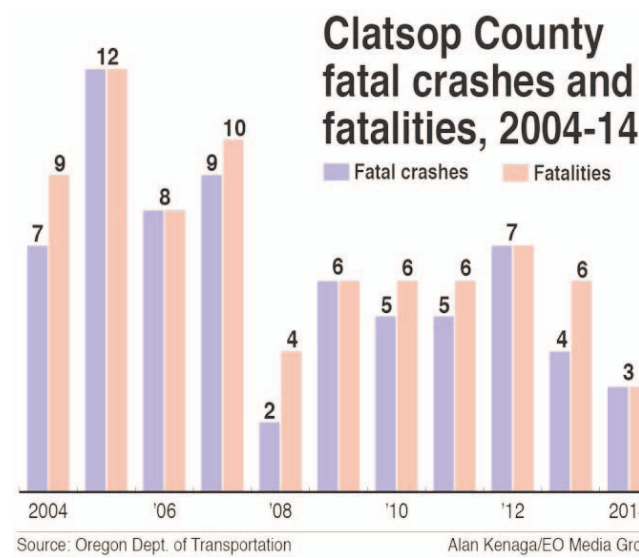
For the sheriff's office, the focus is on county roads which have a relatively low amount of fatal crashes. Williams points to lower speed limits on the local roads as a main factor.

"You take away speed and that has a lot to do with how a crash turns out," he said.

On scene

The sheriff's office, Oregon State Police and local police departments often work together when responding to fatal accidents. Fatalities commonly occur after a vehicle crashes into a ditch, guardrail or the person is ejected from the vehicle, the data shows.

State troopers are regu-



larly called to fatal crashes, even if the crashes do not occur on state highways, because of their enormous amount of training for that type of investigation, Williams said.

Despite the training, Williams said, law enforcement officials are not always able to deal with family or

friends of the deceased, who may be at the crash scene.

"One of the challenges we have always dealt with is the trauma on the scene and helping the families that may be there or show up," he said.

The sheriff's office relies on a chaplain program, where local church leaders

respond with law enforcement to a fatal crash and assist the friends and family through the trauma. Chaplain programs are becoming more popular around the country. Williams estimates at least 70 percent of sheriff's offices in Oregon have such programs.

"It has truly been a blessing," he said. "They can concentrate wholly on the family and the trauma and assist them through that. We have a very devoted group of chaplains that will come out at a drop of a hat."

Improving safety

A key reason for maintaining the crash data is to improve the safety of roadways across the state, according to Torres.

The plan is in place and individual projects will begin as funding becomes available. The first project will add a J-turn near Cullaby Lake. Work is funded and scheduled to begin in 2018. Other proposed projects through the corridor include adding center turn lanes, widening the shoulders and improving intersections.

ODOT's fatal crash data lists multiple causes for the crashes. Speed, fatigue and reckless driving are all found in the data. So is improper passing, not yielding and following too closely.

But alcohol or drugs are not listed as a cause in any of the fatal crashes over the past decade.

Williams has a hard time believing not one crash was caused by impairment. One possible explanation is that crash data is collected before toxicology reports are available or drivers are charged with crimes.

ODOT insists the data is up to date.

"If there was alcohol or drug impairment, it would show up as a cause," Torres said. "I can't explain what is not there."

Seaside Police Log

July 17
4:25 p.m., 900 block of 12th Avenue: Caller reporting person selling door to door. Officer located subject and was advised to seek business license.

7:19 p.m., Edgewood Street and Broadway: Caller reporting possible impaired driver. Officer conducted a traffic stop and advised no impairment but driver did state a bee had entered her vehicle at one time.

9:21 p.m., Promenade: Officer responded to 911 call about homeless man causing a disturbance. When officer arrived man was just sitting on bench. Officer spoke with complainant and stated subject was yelling about America.

July 18
12:11 p.m., 500 block of South Holladay Drive: Caller reported people camping. Officers made contact and advised subjects of complaint.

3:37 p.m., Southbound on U.S. Highway 101: Caller reporting person drinking and driving. Officer located vehicle and advised no alcohol, just energy drinks. Subject advised that caller was hostile towards them on the road.

July 19
4:41 a.m., 1100 block of Avenue D: Caller reported intoxicated female knocking and causing a disturbance. Officers contacted the subject. She agreed to call it a night. Officer gave her

a courtesy ride to another location.

5:57 a.m., Beach near Turnaround: Caller requested welfare check on overnight camper with a small child. Officer checked on them and they were fine.

4:01 p.m., 400 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Assisted the fire department with a bark dust smoldering.

6:40 p.m., 300 block of South Edgewood Street: Officers responded to subject making lewd comments to people as they walked by. Officers pulled away due to priority call.

July 20
12:19 p.m., Broadway and Columbia Street: Caller reported missing child. Mother and child reunited before officer arrived.

1:38 p.m., Southbound from Fourth Avenue: Caller reported intoxicated male falling down and all over the place. Officer made contact with subject and gave him a courtesy ride to his residence.

7:25 p.m., 800 block of Fourth Avenue: Officers responded to report of people arguing as they walked down the street. Upon officer arrival, no argument was taking place. Subjects warned for disorderly conduct.

July 21
9:06 a.m., 2500 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Officer assisted with disoriented patient.

2:32 p.m., 200 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Officer responded to report of person selling things from within vehicle. Advised of ordinance and business license.

6:50 p.m., 400 block of South Holladay Drive: Officers responded to report of suspicious persons. Upon officer arrival, subject was warned for trespass.

July 22
9:04 a.m., 1700 block of 12th Avenue: Caller reported vandalism from the night before. Officer made contact.

10:25 a.m., 500 block of South Downing Street: Daughter called in with complaints about mother having mental issues, requested a welfare check. Officer made contact, subject was uncooperative, warned for disorderly conduct.

8:51 p.m., 700 block of Ocean Way Drive: Third-party caller reporting possible burglary in progress. Officer responded and advised responsible on scene and had left the door open. All was OK.

July 23
9:26 a.m., 400 South Roosevelt Drive: Officers assisted Medix Ambulance, subject transported by Medix to Seaside Providence Hospital.

2:16 p.m., 88800 block of Dawson: Caller reporting traffic complaint. Officer located vehicle and advised subject was arguing with wife which may have caused

him to swerve. Stated they would quit arguing while driving.

4:43 p.m., 11100 block of North Roosevelt Drive: Officer responded to report of male possibly on drugs, requesting a welfare check. Officer located subject who took off swimming across the river and was unable to be located after searching the area.

July 24
2:36 a.m., Stop 'N' Go: Officer stopped vehicle mentioned in three traffic complaints. Complainant did not want to press charges. Subjects warned of issues.

6:21 p.m., 400 block of Roosevelt Drive: Caller reported woman saying she had been attacked. Officers located subjects. Female was chasing the male. Subjects were warned for disorderly conduct.

10:48 p.m., 1600 block of North Roosevelt Drive: Caller reported hearing a couple fighting. Officers responded and made contact. Subjects left the area.

July 25
2:28 p.m., 1000 block of South Columbia Street: Report of a physical disturbance, only heard not seen. Officers made contact, subjects advised verbal only. Subjects warned about disorderly conduct.

6:13 p.m., 1600 block of North Roosevelt Drive: 911 caller reported possible drunk driver. Officer

responded. Verbal dispute; parties separated. No impairment.

8:02 p.m., 300 block of South Columbia Street: Officers responded to report of vandalism. Officers responded; warned subject of disorderly conduct. Reporting party could not be contacted.

11:39 p.m., Turnaround: Subject cited for open container.

July 26
12:52 a.m., Avenue A: 911 call reported large group of people yelling and making noise. Officer responded. Group had dispersed.

3:43 p.m., First Avenue and Promenade: Report of an intoxicated subject. He was advised about detox.

5:47 p.m., 1000 Avenue F: Officer located a male passed out at a church. He was warned.

July 27
7:41 a.m., 900 block of Oceanway: Caller reported a disturbance. Verbal in nature. Parties separated and subject agreed to leave for the dat.

10:01 a.m., 2100 Lewis and Clark Road: Caller reported child's scooter was taken by another child. Officers talked to both parties and were unable to find that crime had been committed.

11:43 a.m., South Edgewood Street: Caller reported driver going over the posted speed limit in a residential neighborhood. A time delay

in call; officer was unable to locate described vehicle.

July 28
10:24 a.m., Third Avenue and Downing Street: Caller reported suspicious person on bike. Officer responded and made contact.

1:17 p.m., 2300 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Report of possible code violation. Officer responded and made contact. Issued warning for selling without a business license and without permission of property owner.

2:12 p.m., Edgewood Street and First Avenue: 911 caller reported small dog in hot car that had vomited on floor. Officer responded, found to be 103 degrees in car. Officer about to enter vehicle and take dog when owner arrived.

4:33 p.m., U.S. Highway 101: 911 caller reported his wife was being tailgated by a driver displaying road rage. Officer witnessed tailgating, and stopped and cited driver.

6:10 p.m., 700 block of Avenue B: Officer contacted intoxicated female, who had fallen and bumped her head. Medix responded to transport her to the hospital.

8:55 p.m., 400 block of South Roosevelt Drive: Officer responded to report of shoplifter. Upon officer arrival, subject was trespassed from business.

10:31 p.m., 1100 block of South Downing Street:

Officers responded to 911 call of disturbance. Upon officer arrival, parties denied any altercation. Advised of disorderly conduct.

July 29
12:28 a.m., 900 block of South Holladay Drive: Officers responded to report of unwanted person. Upon officer contact, subject was trespassed from premises.

12:48 p.m., 1900 block of North Roosevelt Drive: Clatsop Sheriff's Office called in an accident. Officers arrived on scene; subject already called a tow. No damage, no injuries.

5:39 p.m., Broadway Park: Officer responded to 911 call about male acting suspiciously and advised subject under influence of drugs and advised to leave the park. Subject stated he would comply.

July 30
2:10 a.m., 200 block of Broadway: Officer checked on water running in the street.

8:42 a.m., 400 block of North Wahanna Road: Report of a male that was sleeping in his trailer on the property. Officers made contact, subject was not sleeping in his trailer. He was also moving out soon.

11:51 p.m., 100 block of North Columbia Street: Caller reported hearing gunshots. Officers responded and talked to others in the area. They heard fireworks but no gunshots.

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