

Viewpoints

Section D

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Speed-related traffic fatalities grossly inflated by NHTSA

Overall, the *Standard Times*' "West Texas Killer Roads" articles Sunday and Monday, contained good information. However, the writers were extremely misinformed about "speed being a cause (factor) in one-third of all fatalities" and "38 percent in Texas."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is a self-serving agency fabricating statistics to condone overzealous speed enforcement, which unethically provides \$10 billion annually to city, county and state governments and their campaign contributors, the insurance companies.

NHTSA also provides speed enforcement grant money (our tax dollars) to various police departments.

A check of any state's own data generally shows

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speed as a factor in about 10 percent of fatal crashes. Please read "Crash statistics often mislead," (June 30, 2007, at gosanangelo.com). These figures — which are already exaggerated — are then further inflated by NHTSA spin doctors.

Car and Driver magazine and I wrote exposes on their blatant dishonesty. I caught them inflating states' actual speeding statistics by as much as 400 percent.

Alabama's 141 speeding fatal factors in 1997 became 415 in Table 118 of NHTSA's "Speeding-Related Traffic

Fatalities" in "Traffic Safety Facts 1997." Montana's 50 grew into 131. For 2007, Texas shows 822 (includes second and third factors, biases and weather-caused crashes). NHTSA further inflates this exaggerated number all the way up to 1,343 (39 percent), or 521 fictional "speeding" crashes.

For the record in Texas, citing excessive speed as a factor in 429 fatalities constitutes an inflated 12 percent of fatalities (3,461 in 2007). This number still contains biases, plus second and third factors, and should be properly compared to all fatal factors, *not* fatalities.

In reality, true speeding (over the limit and at fault) causes only 2 percent of all crashes and less than 5 percent of injury/fatal collisions. Arizona reports

3.28 percent for 2006 (58 of 1,767). The National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey (U.S. Department of Transportation 2008) concurs on page 23.

This NHTSA-involved research investigated 5,471 injury crashes on the accident sites before being cleared by the police. Their findings totally refute NHTSA fraudulent speed statistics and totally agree with my 24 years of traffic safety research.

Factors related to not paying attention accounted for a huge 44 percent of accidents (page 25). "Traveling too fast" accounted for a mere 5 percent (page 23).

Real research, like the Federal Highway Administration's Speed Limit Survey and several Mauz reports, proves that higher speed

limits reduce crashes, while underposted limits and slower drivers cause more crashes, injuries and fatalities. Please read "Higher speed limits mean safer roadways" (Mauz, June 24, 2006) and "Speed worries unfounded" (Anthony, June 2, 2006) at gosanangelo.com. These objective stories prove that 80 mph is safe on I-10 and I-20.

It's becoming ludicrously redundant correcting the same biased, conflicted misinformation over and over again. When one genuinely wishes to know the truth about a product or service, you do not rely on those greatly profiting from said service (i.e., speed enforcement). Speed does *not* kill. Lack of control kills. Not paying attention kills. DWI kills. Failure to yield kills.

For the record, there is no such thing as a "speeding" problem, only speed limit problems. Federal/state law (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Section 2B.11) requires a speed limit be set at "the 85th percentile speed of free-flowing traffic, rounded up ..." The 85th percentile of speed is the most democratic and safest speed with a 90 percent compliance ratio.

The serious profitability of underposted speed limits makes them the norm. Americans' freedom and safety need to be more important than government/corporate profits.

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Crash statistics often mislead

As a traffic researcher, I must correct some misinformation provided by the Department of Public Safety concerning safety on our roadways.

First of all, speeding is not even close to being the No. 1 cause of highway fatalities. Accident statistics can be misleading. They allow up to three factors per crash. Speeding is more often a second or third factor, not the actual cause of the collision.

DPS accident records show the majority of "speeding" factors (crashes) are actually weather-caused and occur at speeds *below* the posted limit. These qualify under "speed too fast for conditions" and are subjective.

What percentage of all crashes can honestly cite true speeding (above the limit and faster than the flow) as the primary cause?

DPS numbers show that 2 percent of all and 11 percent of fatal crashes. Objectively, true speeding causes 1 percent of all collisions and 5 percent of fatal crashes. Consider that most speed limits are posted too low, further diminishing these small percentages.

The government, police and insurance companies claim "speed is the No. 1 killer" in an attempt to justi-

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fy the usurping of \$6 billion annually from mostly safe-driving Americans. Speed enforcement is about money, not safety. Ironically, the slowest drivers cause the most crashes.

Texas sets more honest speed limits than most states. However, a big statewide problem exists. The blanket 65 mph nighttime speed limit is an unjust law. Most states have rightly abolished lower nighttime speed limits, especially on interstate highways.

It's wrong to expect Texans driving West I-10 at 80 miles per hour during the day to slow all the way down to 65 mph at night, despite less traffic. There is no valid excuse. Headlight technology can safely provide light for 80 mph interstate speeds. I recently observed DPS troopers using the improperly established 65 nighttime limit as a speed trap near Junction.

What are the true leading causes of fatal accidents? Not paying attention, DWI and failure to yield top the list nationwide. DWI seems to be

No. 1 in Texas. The most common West Texas rural fatal crash involves overcorrecting the steering wheel after inadvertently leaving the road. The factor kills about 2,500 people a year in the United States.

The most important things a motorist should do to become a good, safe driver are:

- Pay full attention to your entire driving environment.

- Know your vehicle — check fluids, tire pressure, etc., especially before a long journey.

- When driving, check your mirrors frequently.

- Know what's ahead, what's behind and what's coming from the sides.

- Refrain from using cell phones, reading materials or applying makeup.

Paying attention is the most important aspect of driving safely. Everything else depends on being 100 percent alert behind the wheel. Also consider these driving tips:

- Go with the flow of traffic. Studies consistently show that those driving with the flow or slightly faster are less likely to crash.

- Maintain good following distance — one vehicle length for each 10 mph of travel or more if possible.

- Drive sober.
- Wear your seat belt.
- Be courteous. Use blinkers. Let others pass or merge.
- Slow down in wet weather. During icy weather, stay home if possible.

On the issue of "overcorrecting," remember not to panic. Never jerk the steering wheel. With your foot on the gas pedal, slowly and calmly add steering input until you vehicle returns to your previous highway lane.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. Government is required to provide us with the best-engineered and maintained roads, bridges, etc.

They need to do a better job training teen drivers, educating the public (not misinforming), and setting properly engineered speed limits, traffic signals and other traffic-control devices.

Police need to focus less on speeding and concentrate on truly dangerous drivers, including apprehending drunks before they kill.

We all need to take driving more seriously. May God bless Texas.

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