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Pedestrian Fatalities Remain High in 2014

States Employ Engineering, Education & Enforcement to Prevent Crashes and Save Lives

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The number of pedestrians killed on U.S. roadways last year is expected to remain relatively unchanged from 2013 and approximately 15 percent higher than it was in 2009. *Spotlight on Highway Safety: Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State* is the first look at 2014 pedestrian fatality data. Released today by the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), the report stresses the need for continued vigilance as more Americans continue to choose walking as their preferred mode of transportation.

Using preliminary data provided by the 50 State Highway Safety Offices and the District of Columbia, Dr. Allan Williams, former chief scientist at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, compared the number of pedestrian fatalities from the first six months of 2013 and 2014. Although the preliminary data indicate a slight (2.8 percent) decrease, after factoring in expected undercounting, Williams estimates that 2,125 pedestrians were killed in the first half of 2014, essentially unchanged when compared with the 2,141 pedestrian fatalities during the same period in 2013.

"This is a clearly a good news, bad news scenario," said Jonathan Adkins, GHSA Executive Director. "While we're encouraged that pedestrian fatalities haven't increased over the past two years, progress has been slow. Protecting pedestrians is a priority for GHSA and our members; we're determined to drive the number down to zero."

Making sustained strides in pedestrian safety has been challenging, according to Dr. Williams. "Pedestrian deaths declined steeply from 7,516 in 1975 to 4,735 in 2013. But when you consider the percentage of pedestrians killed in all motor vehicle crashes, the gains are less pronounced. The rate was 17 percent in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It fell to a low of 11 percent in the past decade, but climbed back to 14 percent in 2013."

Dr. Williams pointed out that states with the most fatalities are primarily large-population states with large urban centers. Four states – California, Florida, Texas, and New York – accounted for 43 percent of all pedestrians deaths in 2013. Delaware and Florida had the highest rates of pedestrian deaths per 100,000 residents, at 2.70 and 2.56, respectively. In the District of Columbia, pedestrians account for the highest percentage of all motor vehicle deaths (45 percent), followed by New York (28 percent), Nevada (25 percent), and Delaware (25 percent).

The findings, however, do offer some promise. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia had decreases in pedestrian fatalities in the first half of 2014, compared with the same period in 2013, while five remained the same. Sixteen states had nine or fewer pedestrian fatalities, with Wyoming and Nebraska each reporting just one.

Also encouraging is the substantial reduction in pedestrian fatalities involving the elderly and children. While pedestrians 70 and older have always had the highest per capita crash rate of any age group, that number dropped from 9.3 in 1975 to 2.2 in 2013. Meanwhile, in 1975 nearly one in four pedestrian deaths (21 percent) involved a child between 0 and 12 years of age; that rate fell to 4 percent in 2013.

What is troubling is the 28 percentage point surge in deaths involving pedestrians ages 20 to 69 over this same period. Additionally, about 70 percent of pedestrians killed in motor vehicle crashes are males, many of whom are struck at night and in the fall and winter months. Alcohol is also a factor in many of these fatal crashes. In 2013, more than a third (36 percent) of pedestrians 16 and older involved in fatal crashes had blood alcohol concentrations of .08 or higher. Distraction may play a role as well, since there is some evidence from FARS and emergency room data that both distracted driving and walking are contributing increasingly to pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

To combat the problem, states are using a combination of engineering, education and enforcement solutions. For example, California is distributing a "how to" guide to help communities address pedestrian

safety using social norming principles. At high-risk intersections in Pennsylvania, specially identified crossing guards are educating pedestrians of all ages about safe crossing practices, while police officers in Delaware are participating in education patrols – violators are stopped, educated and, in some cases, given items to increase their visibility.

Recognizing the impact speed has on a pedestrian's survival rate, the speed limit in New York City was lowered from 30 mph to 25 mph last November. The change is just one component of the city's "Vision Zero" plan, which also includes extensive public outreach about safe walking and driving practices, enforcement of pedestrian safety laws and infrastructure improvements. Engineering countermeasures such as pedestrian refuge islands, longer pedestrian signal timing and more visible crosswalks – combined with education and enforcement – are also being used in many states, including Washington, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

The full report and infographics are available online at www.ghsa.org/html/publications/spotlight/peds2014.html.