

Estacada News

Speed Kills

ODOT examines speed-related data on Oregon roadways

By Jim Hart

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It has become almost a daily occurrence in Oregon: someone drives faster than conditions or posted speed limits allow, then crashes, killing or seriously injuring everyone in the vehicle.

On average, due to speeding, more than one person dies on the state's highways every day.

In the last two weeks of July, Oregon State Police troopers and Clackamas County sheriff's deputies reported at least 10 fatalities in Clackamas County and a couple of neighboring counties.

The underlying cause in all of these cases was speed and, in some cases, a little added alcohol, as in the fatal high-speed crash at McIver Park on Aug. 1 that killed one man and injured the driver and three other passengers.

Then are the lucky people – lucky because they can still tell their family members about their mistakes. These people only have to deal with a suspended driver's license, impounded vehicle, court appearance, perhaps a little jail time and a fine of more than \$1,100.

In most cases, common sense seems to have vanished with the landscape in the back window as the driver roars down the Interstate or area highway. In July, Clackamas County Sheriff's deputies made an estimated 50 traffic stops in Estacada, many for speeding violations. Some offenders escape with a warning, but others blatantly violate the law and pay for the offense. Consider the following recent incidents:

North Portland resident Catherine D. Jenkins, 47, told Oregon State Police troopers she was responding to her children's requests to see how fast the family's new sedan would go through Zigzag after she was pulled over for traveling 105 miles per hour on July 18 in an area with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour. The kids were impressed, but their mother had a hefty price to pay.

On July 29, just before 5 p.m., an OSP trooper on a motorcycle saw another sedan traveling west at a high rate of speed on Highway 26 near milepost 60. Using laser technology, the trooper obtained a speed reading of 104 mph in a posted 55-mph zone.

The driver, Brian P. Manfred, 30, of Southwest Portland, was cited for speeding.

And a Sandy man, William A. Niswanger, was caught on Interstate-84 going more than 130 miles per hour on his motorcycle. Niswanger will face a minimum \$1,000 fine for speeding, and his driver's license will be suspended for a minimum of 60 to 90 days.



File photo / Estacada News
Trying to save time by driving too fast can prove deadly.

Need for speed

With excessive speed a contributing factor in more than one-half of fatal crashes in Clackamas County in 2008, the Oregon Department of Transportation's Traffic Safety Division is urging drivers to slow down.

Despite the risk of costly fines, driver's license suspensions, jail time, death and serious injury, it appears that too many Clackamas County drivers feel the need to speed.

One way or another, many have paid the price. According to the latest statistics from ODOT's Transportation Safety Division, excessive speed played a role in 53 percent of Clackamas County's 2008 traffic fatalities.

In fact, speed is the No. 1 cause of traffic fatalities and injuries in Oregon and a contributing factor in half of the state's fatal crashes each year.

"The statistics paint a vivid and frightening picture," said Steve Vitolo, TSD statewide traffic law enforcement program manager. "Speed kills – and it isn't just the speeding drivers who lose their lives: it's innocent drivers and passengers, it's construction workers and law enforcement officers, it's family members and friends."

People who choose to speed kill more innocent Oregonians than drunk drivers, Vitolo said. In 2008 alone, there were 416 speed-related fatalities statewide. Of those killed in speed-related crashes, 40 percent were innocent victims.

Enforcement

To curb speeding in Oregon, law enforcement officers are using new technologies to pinpoint speeders. Laser devices track speed and determine the distance between vehicles, allowing officers to hand out steep fines and license suspensions to deter drivers from this deadly behavior.

Exceeding the speed limit by 30 mph can lead to a 30-day driver's license suspension and a \$679 fine. Speeds of 100 mph or more could earn drivers a fine of \$1,103 plus a suspended license for up to 90 days.

The term "speed-related" includes more than exceeding the posted speed, according to Sally Ridenour, a spokeswoman for ODOT. She said it also means going too fast for road and weather conditions. In the area near Sandy and Mount Hood, she said, going too fast for conditions is definitely an issue.

"Many folks think that as long as they are going the posted speed they are OK," Ridenour said, "but in foggy, rainy, snowy or icy conditions, the posted speed may be too fast for safe driving."

Advice

Of note to Estacada News readers, who regularly travel Highway 224 and Highway 211: Statistics show that speed-related, fatal crashes are four times more likely to occur on a rural road than an urban highway or freeway.

"People think that most fatal crashes happen on freeways and that they can get away with speeding on less-crowded rural roads, but that's just not true," Vitolo said. "Rural roads and local neighborhood streets provide less room to maneuver and more instances when drivers must react to unexpected circumstances."

Vitolo reminds drivers to slow down and obey posted speed limits. He suggests remembering the compounded severity of crashes that occur when traveling even a few miles per hour over the limit.

And, he says, the time saved by speeding is negligible at best, and deadly at worst: "Speeding is not worth the increased risk of a severe crash."

For more information, call Vitolo at 503-932-0493 or visit www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/Traffic_Enforcement.shtml.

Estacada News Editor Evan Jensen contributed to this story.

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