

Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day

Traffic crashes and deaths have affected the lives of most Americans. Many of us have lost family and friends in the tragedies that occur on our nation's highways—about 40,000 each year. That figure compares to 119 Sailors and Marines who died in private motor-vehicle crashes during fiscal year 2004. We can and must lower such significant losses of life.

Vehicle crashes are an even greater threat to life and health in the United States than crime.

For example, a murder occurs every 34 minutes, compared to one traffic death every 13 minutes. Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death in the United States for people ages 4 to 33, which translates into an economic cost estimated at \$150 billion each year, or 2.2 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product.

We can reduce crashes and save lives on our highways by increasing our nation's focus on reducing driver inattention and drunk driving, increasing the use of seat belts and child-safety restraints, and improving our signs and roads. That's why public-sector and private-sector groups have joined forces for an annual event called "Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day"—celebrated each Oct. 10.

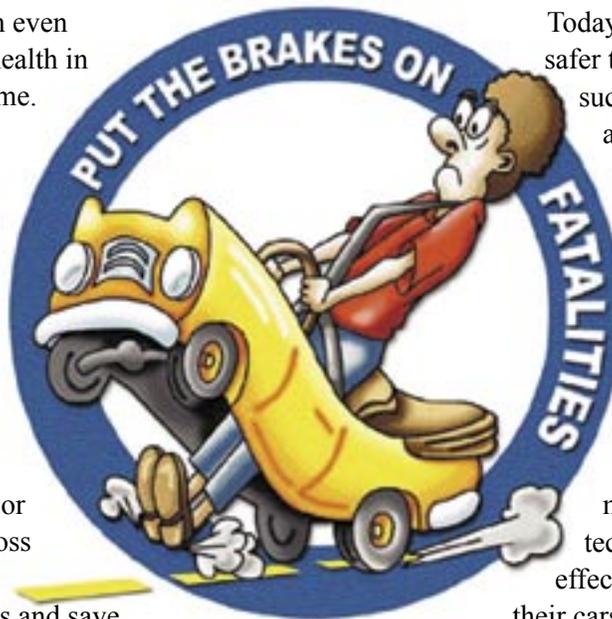
Here are some things we all can do to put the brakes on fatalities:

Driver Behavior

Drunk driving, speeding, and drowsy, aggressive and distracted driving continue to be major problems on our roads and bridges. Motorists

should slow down, drive defensively, and wear all protective gear—like seat belts and motorcycle helmets. Bicyclists and pedestrians need to be alert and careful. In 2003, 619 bicyclists and 4,749 pedestrians died in traffic crashes.

Vehicle Design and Maintenance



Today's passenger vehicles are safer than ever. Advancements such as integrated seat belts, air bags, anti-lock brakes, improved seat design, new crumple-zone technology, and other features mean motorists and passengers are able to walk away from crashes that once claimed lives.

These improvements will continue; however, owners must learn to use the new technologies for them to be effective. Drivers also must keep their cars and trucks maintained to ensure proper performance.

Roadway Design and Signage

Substandard road conditions, obsolete designs, and roadside hazards contribute to more than 15,000 annual highway deaths—nearly a third of all fatal crashes. This number can be reduced with roadway improvements such as wider lanes, stripes and shoulders; better lighting and brighter, highly reflective signs and devices; intersection improvements; median barriers; and rumble strips.

Join family, friends and co-workers this Oct. 10 and help put the brakes on traffic fatalities. "Drive As If Your Life Depends on It"—that's the official slogan for this annual event. ■