



HIGHWAY SAFETY CHALLENGE

A partnership between:

- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Virginia State Police
- Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles

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VDOT, DMV, State Police Partner to Reduce Highway Fatalities

Safety Challenge Issued to Virginia Drivers

RICHMOND – More than 900 people are killed on Virginia’s highways each year. That’s an average of nearly 19 per week or three per day. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia State Police (VSP) and Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) are joining forces to improve traffic safety in Virginia through a partnership to put the brakes on highway fatalities.

As part of the newly formed multi-agency partnership, the three agencies are aligning their efforts to significantly reduce the number of deaths on Virginia’s highways and work collaboratively to address some of the most significant risk factors for highway fatalities. They are also reaching out to partners from the non-profit and private sectors to join in the challenge to cut by 100 the number of deaths on Virginia highways by 2010.

“This partnership represents our renewed commitment to work together, and our eagerness to join with safety partners across the state in reducing traffic fatalities,” said D.B. Smit, DMV Commissioner and Gov. Tim Kaine’s highway safety representative. “We want to remind citizens that traffic crashes are caused by the way we drive, and our efforts will continue to educate Virginians about critical safety lessons.” VDOT

Commissioner David S. Ekern added, “There are many things our three agencies can do to improve safety from the engineering, enforcement and education standpoint. Still, there is no more effective tool available to prevent crashes and reduce the risk of injury or death if a crash occurs than changing driver behavior. We must remind everyone in Virginia that they are responsible for their safety each time they turn the key.”

The first initiative launched as an element of this highway safety partnership is a new public education campaign called, “Are you Virginia’s next traffic fatality?” The campaign, rolled out today at Henrico County’s Varina High School, addresses some of the most significant factors contributing to deaths on Virginia highways:

- Lack of seatbelt use leads to more traffic fatalities than any other single driving behavior
- Crashes are the leading cause of death for Virginians under the age of 30
- Cars, trucks, pedestrians, bicycles and motorcycles must safely coexist on the roadways. Highway motorcyclist deaths are up 61 percent from last year, and large truck-involved crashes accounted for 118 fatalities in 2006.

There are five top ways that motorists can help reduce the number of highway fatalities:

- Buckle up
- Avoid distractions
- Share the road
- Drive drug- and alcohol-free
- Obey speed limits

Virginians will find safety reminders on VDOT's electronic variable message signs, highway advisory radio stations and on 511 Virginia. Safety messages in welcome centers, rest areas and DMV customer service centers across the commonwealth will also remind motorists that no one gets into the car thinking that will be the last time they ever drive, but it is for too many. Virginia State Police will also be stepping up their patrols to enforce Virginia's traffic safety laws.

"Our challenge is to slow the rate of highway deaths and to make the daily ticker of highway deaths stop moving," said Col. W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police superintendent. "It is only together that we can reach our goal of saving 100 lives by 2010. We are therefore issuing a challenge to all residents of Virginia. Help us put the brakes on Virginia fatalities by the end of 2007."

The three state agencies will also align with AAA, the Virginia Trucking Association and other partners in highway safety to promote and enhance these critical messages and calls to action.

To learn more about Virginia's Highway Safety Challenge or to find out how you can join the fight to save lives, visit www.safeVAhighways.org. The site will provide resources for motorists to learn more about how they can keep their loved ones from becoming highway crash statistics. The site will also display the daily tally of highway deaths to track Virginia's progress being made to reduce the annual fatality rate from the 961 fatalities experienced in 2006.

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Are you Virginia's next traffic fatality?

**Buckle up • Avoid distractions • Share the road
Drive drug & alcohol free • Obey speed limits**