

Speeding Wrecks Lives Kickoff

Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA Administrator | Opening Remarks

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning, or good afternoon, depending on where you're joining us from. I'm Dr. Steve Cliff, the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and I'd like to welcome you to today's kickoff for our first-ever national speeding prevention campaign.

Starting tomorrow, our *Speeding Wrecks Lives* campaign will hit airways, reminding everyone that speeding is always unsafe. We're trying to halt a dangerous trend that took off during the pandemic.

When normal life came to a halt in March 2020, many of us initially expected traffic deaths to decline as more people stayed home.

Instead, we saw the opposite. Risky behaviors skyrocketed, and traffic fatalities spiked. From 2019 to 2020, we saw a 15% increase in speeding-related fatalities.

We'd hoped these trends were limited to 2020, but sadly, they weren't.

NHTSA projects that almost 43,000 people died in crashes last year, a 10.5% increase from 2020. That's the highest number of traffic deaths in 16 years.

We're predicting increases in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico compared to 2020. And in California, fatalities rose more than 10%.

We also saw an increase in risky behaviors, including speeding.

Local news outlets across the country have covered countless stories of speeders clocked going 50 or 60 miles per hour over the speed limit.

Local roads, like the one behind me, are – perhaps surprisingly – more dangerous than highways for speeders. In 2020, 87% percent of all speeding-related traffic fatalities on American roads occurred on non-interstate roads.

Speed limits are there for a reason. Even advancements in vehicle safety cannot fully keep you safe from the dangers of speeding.

While developing our anti-speeding campaign over the last several months, we met with members of the driving public to hear when and why they speed, as well as how risky they consider speeding. These discussions helped us develop these ads and messages.

We heard drivers say they speed because they're running late, the speed limit is unreasonable, or they're moving with the flow of traffic. Some even said it's just how they prefer to drive. The majority of the people we talked to all said they know what the speed limits are, but they just ignore them.

But perhaps more troubling, in terms of risk, drivers see speeding as no big deal. They see other behaviors as riskier, including impaired driving, distracted driving, driving in bad weather, and not wearing a seat belt.

These drivers are wrong. Speeding is unsafe. It gives you less time to react to objects on the road, sharp turns, or other drivers. It also extends your stopping time and makes it harder for other vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists to judge your distance.

There's no acceptable level of speeding. Going "just a little over" makes you a less safe driver. And it's against the law.

My message today is: Speeding has consequences. And those consequences could cost you your life. It could also kill your loved ones, pedestrians, cyclists, and people in other cars and trucks on the road. We need to view speeding as socially unacceptable and as dangerous as driving impaired.

That's why we're launching this public service campaign, our first ever dedicated solely to speeding. Our \$8 million national paid media features TV, radio, digital and social media ads in English and Spanish. Our primary target for this campaign will be drivers ages 18 to 44. And we're providing messaging resources to states so they can tailor them to their needs.

I am deeply troubled by this reckless behavior. I also want to emphasize the serious equity concerns that become apparent as we launch this campaign. We're finalizing some new research, and preliminary data suggest that road travel is riskier for Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native travelers than for white people. The disparity persists even when accounting for the amount and type of travel.

This preliminary data also suggest that men die in greater numbers than women, but women face greater risks of injury and death in crashes. NHTSA's safety measures have helped close the gap and protected countless lives. But we still have work to do.

We are committed to saving lives, and this research shows why it is imperative to stop dangerous driving behaviors like speeding everywhere.

Joining me today are representatives of state and national organizations dedicated to our shared safety mission. I want to thank each of them for joining me in Los Angeles this morning. Thank you also to CALTRANS – the California Department of Transportation – for hosting us today.

The takeaway is clear: Speeding can ruin lives. Don't let your desire to get there a few minutes faster keep you from arriving at all.