

AAA: Recent roadside tragedies underscore need for protect emergency responders

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AAA Research Reveals That Some Drivers May Not Grasp the Danger They Pose To Those at the Roadside

MADISON, Wisc., (Sept. 29, 2021) – Following the deaths of two AAA tow providers, The Auto Club Group is raising awareness of the dangers emergency responders face on the roadside and how critical it is that drivers follow move over laws.

Glenn Ewing, 32, was killed July 4 near Cincinnati, OH, while placing a disabled vehicle on the back of a flatbed on the side of the road. He leaves behind a fiancée and two children. Only three weeks later, 30-year-old David Meyer was assisting a driver on the left-hand shoulder in Castle Rock, CO, when he was also struck and killed. **As of August of this year, 14 tow providers have been killed while helping others at the roadside in 2021.**

“Deaths like these can be avoided if drivers slow down and move over to give these people room to work safely,” said Scott VerBracken, Vice President of Automotive, AAA – The Auto Club Group. “We can’t stress enough how important it is to pay attention so you have time to change lanes when you see AAA, an emergency responder, or simply anybody along the side of the road.”

Legislation is currently pending in the Wisconsin State Senate that would extend the protections currently provided to road maintenance and construction crews to emergency responders – including tow truck drivers. The bill would double the fines for certain traffic violations committed when such crews are on scene, and make a

motorist who injures a roadside responder while committing a traffic violation subject to a fine of up to \$10,000 and nine months in prison. AAA testified in support of this bill, which has already been passed by the State Assembly.

The High Rate of Roadside Fatalities

An average of 24 emergency responders including tow providers are struck and killed by vehicles while working at the roadside each year – meaning someone in this line of work is killed, on average, every other week.

It's not just tow providers and other emergency responders being killed on the side of the road. Since 2015, over 1,600 people have been struck and killed while outside of a disabled vehicle.

“These men and women who work on our roadside are just trying to make a living while caring for others,” VerBracken continued. “They already combat bad weather conditions like rain, snow, extreme cold or heat. They shouldn't also have to also worry about a vehicle drifting into their line of safety. Please slow down and move over, so these workers can get home to their families.”

To protect these individuals, AAA and other traffic safety advocates have led the way in getting Move Over laws passed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The law requires drivers to move over a lane or slow down for first responders on the roadside.

Startling new survey data from AAA - The Auto Club Group finds that:

- 17% of Wisconsin drivers have experienced a crash or near miss with an emergency vehicle on the side of the road.
- 19% are unsure or believe there is not a Move Over Law in Wisconsin.

Why aren't Drivers Complying with Move Over Laws?

There are many reasons these types of crashes happen—**unfamiliarity** with Move Over laws, the driver being distracted and not realizing there is someone at the side of the road until it's too late, etc. **Impairment** is another factor, which greatly reduces a driver's judgment and reaction time.

The reality is that drivers are increasingly **distracted** while driving. Previous AAA Foundation research has found that drivers are up to four times as likely to crash if

they are talking on a cell phone while driving and up to eight times as likely to be in a crash if texting.

“If you drive distracted, you may not notice the person on the roadside until it’s too late; and that’s how tragedies occur,” said Nick Jarmusz, director of public affairs, AAA – The Auto Club Group. “Drivers should constantly scan the road, not their phone. If you see something, anything, on the shoulder ahead, slow down and move over. It could literally save someone’s life.”

AAA’s Advice for Drivers

To protect roadside workers, drivers with disabled vehicles, and others, and to improve highway safety, AAA offers these precautionary tips:

- Remain alert, avoid distractions and focus on the task of driving.
- Keep an eye out for situations where emergency vehicles, tow trucks, utility service vehicles or disabled vehicles are stopped on the side of the road.
- When you see these situations, slow down and if possible move one lane over and away from the people and vehicles stopped at the side of the road.

AAA’s work on Slow Down, Move Over Laws

Since 2007, AAA has been instrumental in passing [Move Over laws](#) in all states, including advocating for those laws to cover tow providers and other emergency responders. Additionally, AAA clubs have participated in educational and advocacy initiatives, creating public service announcements and reaching out to state officials. But, there is more work to be done. AAA is committed to raising awareness of the Move Over laws and the dangers associated with working at the roadside.

These laws require motorists to move over one lane or slow down when approaching an incident where tow providers, police, firefighters or emergency medical service crews are working at the roadside. Many states have also expanded their laws to cover other vehicles, such as utility and municipal (e.g. sanitation vehicles) fleets, as well as any disabled vehicle on the side of the road.

About the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a nonprofit, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation’s mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by researching

their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur. This research develops educational materials for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other road users.

About the AAA Traffic Safety Survey

The AAA Traffic Safety Survey was conducted online among residents living in Wisconsin from July 20 – 31, 2021. A total of 350 residents completed the survey. Survey results asked of all respondents have a maximum margin of error of $\pm 5.2\%$ points. Responses are weighted by age and gender to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the adult population (18+) in Wisconsin.

About AAA - The Auto Club Group

The Auto Club Group (ACG) is the second largest AAA club in North America with more than 14 million members across 14 U.S. states, the province of Quebec and two U.S. territories. ACG and its affiliates provide members with roadside assistance, insurance products, banking and financial services, travel offerings and more. ACG belongs to the national AAA federation with more than 62 million members in the United States and Canada. AAA's mission is to protect and advance freedom of mobility and improve traffic safety. For more information, get the [AAA Mobile app](#), visit [AAA.com](#), and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.