

# Dane County Traffic Safety Commission: Unprecedented number of fatalities from motor vehicle crashes

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Dane County is experiencing an unprecedented number of fatalities from motor vehicle crashes involving both speeding and alcohol or drug use, according to Sgt. Matt Meyer, Dane County Sheriff's Office and co-chair for the county's Traffic Safety Commission (TSC). A summary at a recent TSC quarterly meeting showed that during the fourth quarter of 2021, two of every three fatalities on Dane County roads resulted from crashes where both were a factor.

From October to December 2021, ten deaths resulted from six fatal crashes in the cities of Madison, Sun Prairie and Middleton and towns of Montrose and Dunkirk. Six of these deaths occurred in crashes that involved both speeding and alcohol and/or drug use.

This continues a trend, Meyer said. "During all of 2021, we saw seven fatal crashes resulting in eleven deaths that involved both speeding and alcohol or drug use. This is an increase of over forty percent from averages in the past five years."

"Excessive speed or use of alcohol or drugs results in increased risk for traffic crashes. But the combination of these two factors is especially lethal," said Cheryl Wittke, TSC co-chair and executive director of Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County. "When a crash involves multiple factors, it dramatically increases the likelihood it will result in death. In Dane County we see our share of this, and no family should have to face the tragic results."

The overall number of traffic fatalities also increased significantly last year. Meyer noted an average of 33 crash-related deaths annually over the past five years, but 48 deaths in 2021, a 33% increase. Almost half of these were speed-related, and fatalities occurred on all types of roads throughout the county, including in rural areas.

In response to the alarming trends in traffic safety, four TSC-member workgroups are developing strategies to address: (1) driving impaired by alcohol and drug use, (2) risky driving behavior, including speeding, distracted driving, and use of occupant protection measures, (3) pedestrian crashes, and (4) racial disparities and traffic injuries. Additionally, these workgroups will collaborate with community task forces meeting around Dane County to propose solutions for locally identified issues.