

Distractions drive crashes, statistics say

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Driver inattention or distraction is the top contributing factor in crashes, according to statistics compiled by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

■ In 1997, the most current numbers available, behaviors police cited most often as contributing factors in Minnesota crashes are, in order of frequency: 1) driver inattention or distraction, 2) failure to yield right of way, 3) illegal or unsafe speed.

■ In the two-thirds of crashes involving two or more vehicles, "driver inattention or distraction" is cited 25 percent of the time, and failure to yield is cited 20 percent of the time. In the remaining one-third of crashes involving just a single moving vehicle, illegal or unsafe speed is cited 22 percent of the time. Speed is cited more drivers younger than 35.

■ Males are involved in fatal crashes 2.7 times more often than females.

■ One in 11 crashes in 1997 involved a teen-ager. One in 29 involved a 50- to 54-year-old.

■ The number of alcohol-related deaths in 1997, 178, was the lowest since 1984.

■ There was a 3 percent increase in crashes that killed or injured pedestrians in 1997.

■ Crashes involving bicyclists increased 4 percent from the previous year, and the number of injuries went up 5 percent.

■ Crashes involving trains were the lowest ever, and dropped 14 percent from 1996 to 1997.