

NISSAN



Study shows rural roads are most deadly

By Tom Kenworthy

The death rate for motorists on rural roads was more than 2.5 times the rate for driving on all other roads in 2003, a study to be released today shows.

Safety improvements on rural, non-interstate routes have lagged, although driving on all U.S. roads and highways has become less dangerous since 1990, according to an analysis of federal highway data by The Road Information Program (TRIP).

"The nation's rural roads . . . are exposing rural residents and visitors to an unacceptable level of risk," says William Wilkins, executive director of the highway information research organization in Washington. "We know how to make rural roads safer. What is missing is adequate funding for road safety projects that will save numerous lives."

Among the study's findings:

- ▶ 52% of the 42,301 average annual traffic deaths from 1999 through 2003 occurred on rural, non-interstate routes, although travel on those roads represents 28% of miles driven.

- ▶ The death rate on rural roads in 2003 was 2.72 per 100 million miles driven, compared with 0.99 on all other roads.

- ▶ From 1990 through 2003, the death rate on all routes excluding rural roads decreased 32%. The death rate on rural roads declined by 21% during the same period.

- ▶ Many rural areas, particularly in the West and South, are gaining population, but roads in those areas are more likely than

urban roads to have features that make driving hazardous. They include narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, steep slopes and pavement drop-offs.

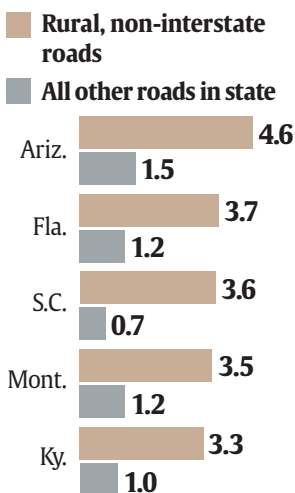
Tools to improve safety include rumble strips, better signs, lane markings and lighting, guardrails, and removal of obstacles along roadsides.

A transportation spending bill pending in Congress could increase funding for rural road improvements. But substantial improvements will depend more on state and local funding, which represent about three-quarters of U.S. spending on roads and highways, says Frank Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP.

TRIP is a non-profit group supported by insurance companies, labor unions and businesses involved in highway construction and engineering.

Danger on rural roads

States with the highest death rates on rural, non-interstate roads in 2003 for every 100 million miles of travel:



Source: The Road Information Program

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

DISCUSSION

Why do you think the death rate on both rural and non-rural roads declined between 1990 and 2003? Why are rural roads dangerous? What is preventing state and local governments from making rural roads safer? Who pays for the bulk of highway improvements?

APPLICATIONS

- ✓ comprehension
- ✓ decision making
- ✓ problem solving
- ✓ research
- ✓ safety
- ✓ writing

ACTIVITY

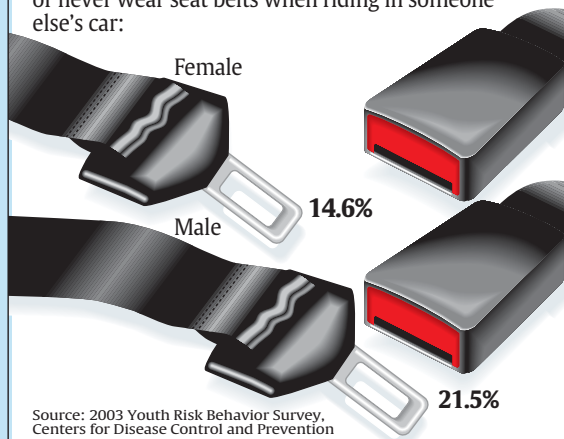
According to the article, what tools improve road safety? As a class, discuss other strategies for making rural roads less deadly (e.g., lowering speed limits, educating drivers, etc.). As individuals or in small groups, list all of the ideas from the article and your class's discussion. Next, visit a short strip of road in your area that you think is dangerous or in need of improvement. Decide which of the enhancements on your list would make the road safer. Finally, write a professional-sounding report that describes your recommendations, and send it to your city's mayor.

STOP

USA TODAY Snapshots

Teen passengers don't always buckle up

Percentage of high schoolers who say they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding in someone else's car:



Source: 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

By Cristina Abello and Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Studies show that seat belts save over 10,000 lives in America every year. Yet, according to the graph, a large percentage of teens rarely use these safety devices. List five reasons you would give friends for buckling up.

Officials say that seat belts are helpful because they distribute the forces of rapid deceleration over larger and stronger parts of the body such as the chest,

hips and shoulders. The safety belt stretches slightly to slow down and to increase its stopping distance. The head, face and chest are also less likely to strike the steering wheel, windshield and dashboard of the car's interior frame.

Using the above information, design a high visibility enforcement campaign aimed at teen motorists who choose not to buckle up.