

UA Study Shows Alcohol, Speed and Poor Weather are a Lethal Combination for Holiday Driving

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – Enemies of traffic safety remain alcohol, speed and poor weather conditions, according to a University of Alabama *CARE* Research & Development Laboratory study of the two most recent Thanksgiving holiday traffic patterns.

The UA lab researches crash statistics for the state and found some interesting results related to holiday travel.

“Alcohol, speed and bad weather are a lethal combination,” said Dr. Allen Parrish, professor of computer science and director of the *CARE* Research & Development Laboratory at The University of Alabama.

“Our research has shown that these types of crashes are concentrated more in rural areas and during the late-night hours, making access to emergency medical services an additional problem. Furthermore, these accidents typically involve single-vehicles that have run off of the road, which makes it difficult to find the wrecked vehicle,” explained Parrish.

Another traffic trend that has continued since 2002 concerns the distribution of crashes over the entire Thanksgiving week, but that doesn’t mean spreading out the traffic reduces the number of crashes. Research and crash analysis show crashes have moved from Wednesday back to the Monday and Tuesday of the week.

A negative aspect of these trends concerns individuals who are beginning their Thanksgiving holiday earlier. For some, every day off work becomes a Friday or Saturday night in relation to drinking alcohol. Because of the increase in drivers under the influence, Parrish recommends that those traveling avoid driving during the late night hours of the Thanksgiving week and the nights between Christmas and New Year’s Day.

As for speed, the UA lab’s research has shown for every 10 miles per hour increase in impact speed, the probability of the crash resulting in a fatality doubles. For example, reducing your speed from 75 mph to 65 mph reduces the probability of being killed in a crash by 50 percent.

This dramatic benefit of reduced speeds was recently illustrated through the Alabama Department of Public Safety’s “Take Back Our Highways” campaign, which successfully reduced the speeds of motorists and resulted in a significant decrease in fatal crashes.

Weather conditions have also been identified as a contributing factor to increased crashes during the holidays.

“Quite often when we see a high crash day, we research the weather for that day and find that it was raining over a good part of the state,” said Dr. David Brown, UA professor of computer science and director of development of the CARE Research & Development Laboratory. “It might be difficult to avoid the necessity of driving in wet weather, but slow down to accommodate the slippery roads and reduced visibility.”

Other recommendations that Parrish and Brown have for staying safe during the holidays include:

- Be acquainted with traffic problem areas and avoid them
- Don’t drive while intoxicated, don’t ride with others who are, and avoid the obvious times and places where you might become the victim of drunken driving
- Always wear your seat belt, regardless of how long the trip
- Keep children properly restrained in the back seat
- Watch the weather reports, and plan your trip accordingly

“Driving does not have to be dangerous,” said Brown. “If you keep these basics in mind, you will cut your chances of being killed to a probability very close to zero.”

UA’s CARE Research & Development Laboratory uses leading edge technologies to offer products and specialized software development services in a variety of areas, particularly traffic safety and law enforcement. The laboratory has designed an electronic citation system for use by law enforcement officers in the state of Alabama.

The system is being used by every state trooper in Alabama and is currently being deployed to police departments and sheriff offices. Additionally, the CARE Research & Development Laboratory routinely provides a variety of safety studies and planning documents, such as Crash Facts Books and the State of Alabama Highway Safety Plan.

In 1837, The University of Alabama became one of the first five universities in the nation to offer engineering classes. Today, UA’s fully accredited [College of Engineering](#) has about 1,900 students and nearly 100 faculty. In the last seven years, students in the College have been named *USA Today* All-USA College Academic Team members, Goldwater scholars, Hollings scholars and Portz scholars.

The University of Alabama, a student-centered research university, is in the midst of a planned, steady enrollment growth with a goal of reaching 28,000 students by 2010. This growth, which is positively impacting the campus and the state’s economy, is in keeping with UA’s vision to be the university of choice for the best and brightest students. UA, the state’s flagship university, is an academic community united in its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all Alabamians.