

Thanksgiving eve risky drive time, study says

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Drivers distracted by thoughts of turkey and dressing might have been to blame for the 585 car wrecks in Alabama last year on the day before Thanksgiving. Whatever the cause, 2007 statistics show today is one of the most dangerous days to be on the road in this state.

A study at the University of Alabama showed that the day before Thanksgiving ranks fifth among days last year with the most crashes statewide. Huntsville, Decatur and Auburn saw the largest increase in wrecks on that day from 2006 to 2007.

Within the city limits here, 54 wrecks occurred on the day before Thanksgiving in 2007, compared with 18 wrecks on the same day in 2006.

Analysts at the University of Alabama's CARE Research & Development Laboratory partially attribute the high numbers statewide to a rainy day last year. It also appears that most travelers had no choice but to travel on Wednesday because they had to work earlier in the week, said assistant research engineer Rhonda Stricklin.

"If you start saying, 'Why were the numbers up,' that can be hard to determine," she said. "That's not easy to answer. It may not be one factor; it could be a combination of factors."

The university lab analyzed statewide crash data from 2007, and the results were surprising to everyone involved in the study, Stricklin said. The day with the most crashes was March 15, a day with no real significance other than being the "Ides of March."

The worst crash days were generally Thursdays, with one of the top five falling on Friday, Stricklin said.

If you don't have to drive far for Thanksgiving dinner, you might fare better if you hit the road Thursday. Only 196 crashes occurred on Thanksgiving Day last year, according to the study. Stricklin said the lower numbers may be the result of less traffic - far fewer people are going to work and running errands on a holiday....