

DID YOU KNOW???

RAISING SPEED LIMITS CAUSES INCREASE IN DEATHS

If you are old enough to be driving in 1973, you will likely remember that Congress required all states to adopt 55 mph as their maximum speed limit in order to receive their share of highway funds. This was instituted because of concerns over fuel availability rather than safety. Remember the gas lines? Remember also the odd and even days – you could only purchase gasoline on either odd numbered days or on even days, depending on your license plate.

Well, in 1987, with energy concerns fading, Congress relaxed the restriction, allowing states to increase speed limits to 65 mph on rural interstates. In 1995, the law was completely repealed, again allowing states to set their own speed limits.

A new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) study shows that increases in speed limits over two decades have cost 33,000 lives in the U.S. In 2013 alone, the increases resulted in 1,900 additional deaths, according to the study.

Not surprisingly, Institute researchers found that travel speeds increased following the repeal of the National Maximum Speed Limit. They also found that fatalities went up, first on rural interstates with the law's partial repeal and later on all interstates after the full repeal.

The increases have continued. Today, six states have 80 mph limits, and drivers in Texas can legally drive 85 mph on some roads. Today, only in the District of Columbia is the maximum speed limit 55 mph. New York, along with a relatively small number of other states, still holds the maximum speed limit on interstates to 65 mph.

The study found that, looking at deaths per billion miles traveled by state and roadway type, each five mph increase in the maximum speed limit resulted in a four percent increase in fatalities. The increase on interstates and freeways, the roads most affected by state maximums, was eight percent.

The study doesn't include the increases of the past three years. In 2013, only Texas and Utah had limits above 75 mph. Five more have joined that club since then, and others have abandoned 65 mph limits for 70 mph.

Charles Farmer, IIHS vice president for research and statistical services and the author of the study says "Since 2013, speeds have only become more extreme, and the trend shows no sign of abating. We hope state lawmakers will keep in mind the deadly consequences of higher speeds when they consider raising limits," states Farmer.

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