

DID YOU KNOW???

SPEED LIMIT 85 MPH

Twenty five years ago the nation's maximum speed limit was 65 mph. Interestingly, in 1993, a few states, New York included, still had a maximum speed limit of only 55 mph. Over the past 2 1/2 decades, maximum speed limits have been raised in most states, and now the maximum speed limit in the US is 85 mph on some roads in Texas. Many of the mid-west states allow speeds up to 80 mph, while most of the eastern states allow maximum speeds of 70 mph. Only a few remaining states, New York being one of them, have a maximum speed limit of only 65 mph.

An interesting article in the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's (IIHS) April issue of "Status Report" says rising speed limits over the past 25 years has cost nearly 37,000 lives, including more than 1,900 in 2017 alone, a new IIHS study shows.

Maximum speed limits are set by the states, and they have been rising since the mid-1990s. Proponents of raising the speed limit often argue that such increases simply bring the law in line with reality, since most drivers exceed the limit. Once the limit is raised, however, drivers go even faster.

Today, 41 states have maximum speed limits of 70 mph or higher. Six states have 80 mph limits, and, as previously mentioned, drivers in Texas can legally drive 85 mph on some roads.

For the new study, Charles Farmer, IIHS vice president for research and statistical services, analyzed the effect of changes in the maximum posted limit in every state from 1993 to 2017. Looking at annual traffic fatalities per mile traveled for each state and taking into account other factors that affect fatality rates — including changes in unemployment, the number of potential young drivers (ages 16-24) and the seat belt use rate — he calculated the effect of speed limit increases.

Farmer found that a 5 mph increase in the maximum speed limit was associated with an 8 percent increase in the fatality rate on interstates and freeways — the roads most directly affected by changes to the maximum speed limit — and a 3 percent increase on other roads. In total, over the 25-year study period, there were 36,760 more deaths — 13,638 on interstates and freeways — and 23,122 on other roads — than would have been expected if maximum speed limits hadn't changed over that time. "Driving 70 instead of 65 saves a driver at best 6½ minutes on a 100-mile trip," Farmer says. "Before raising speed limits, state lawmakers should consider whether that potential time savings is worth the additional risk to lives."

Putting this in perspective, in the 25 years from 1993 to 2017, the same period studied by the IIHS, the total fatalities from all commercial airline crashes in the US totaled 1,379, or an average of 55 people per year. It would take about 670 years to kill the same number of people in commercial airline crashes that the IIHS attributes just to the increase of speed limits in the US over the past 25 years.

How important is a few minutes per trip? You be the judge!