

The warmth of the sun hitting your face, the comfortable breeze whispering by your head, and the smell of lilacs moving through the neighborhood all hint at one thing, summer is on its way. Riding along on the coattails of all the great things about a Minnesota summer is the sobering reality that summer is the most dangerous time of the year on our roads. Even though the 100 days between Memorial Day and Labor Day account for about a quarter of the year, about one third of all fatal crashes happen in these 100 days. We are about to enter the time of year when it is most important for drivers to practice safe driving habits. Let's talk about the top four contributing factors in Minnesota traffic fatalities: speeding, unbuckled motorists, impaired driving, and distractions.

As you roll through heavy traffic bounded by orange cones with the seemingly constant question of "are we there yet?" coming from the back seat, you conclude that whoever first uttered the quote life is about the journey not the destination had never been on an hours' long family road trip. As the road construction finally ebbs and traffic loosens, you feel relief as you press firmly on the accelerator pedal. The temptation to view the number on the speed limit sign as more of a suggestion than a requirement is strong. As the top contributing factor to traffic fatalities, speed is a deceptive danger. Driving at 10 or more MPH above the speed limit doesn't feel dangerous, especially in modern vehicles. The danger of speeding comes when we exceed either the vehicle's ability to effectively deal with the road conditions, such as in rain or snow, or when we exceed our ability to effectively react to dangers. Driving at 55 MPH, a vehicle will travel about 20 feet in the time it takes the average person to just perceive a danger in front of them. Driving at 75 MPH that same vehicle will travel 27.5 feet before that same average person perceives the danger. That 7.5 feet can mean the difference between a heart-pounding near miss and a tragedy. Resist the urge to shorten the journey through speeding to reduce your odds of a crash.

Wear your seatbelt. This is a very simple message. Studies have shown that seatbelts save lives. The safety features inside your vehicle operate on the premise that occupants will be wearing seatbelts. I can assure you, after having witnessed the aftermath of scores of crashes, the vehicles we use everyday are remarkably well engineered to keep safe the people who remain inside of them even through the most extreme impacts. Seatbelts save lives, make sure yours is on.

Impaired driving is another very simple and straight forward message. Have a sober driver for every trip. According to one study, each 0.02 increase in a driver's BAC nearly doubled his or her risk of being in a single-vehicle fatal crash. Impaired driving can be a costly and deadly mistake for you or someone else. Always driver sober.

So you've finally made it through the construction and are driving along happily at the posted speed limit knowing that you'll be arriving at your destination very soon. Then you hear it. That all too familiar sound from your cell phone telling you that something is going on in your social media world that an algorithm has determined you are going to want to see. You glance down at your phone and verify that a notification is waiting for you. What now? At 60 MPH, your vehicle travels 88 feet every second. What could happen in the 1 or 2 seconds it takes to read that notification? For certain, your vehicle will travel almost 200 feet without anyone at the controls. What happens in those 200 feet is anyone's guess. State law and your safety compel you to leave that notification for later. Your job as a driver is to focus on driving. Put away the distraction and focus on getting you and your passengers safely through the most dangerous days of driving.

Summer can be a dangerous time on Minnesota roads. By making good decisions, you can avoid dangerous driving habits and put the odds in your favor. For more crime prevention information and

safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at:

<https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.