

NEBRASKA

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Jim Pillen, Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NDOT Annual Highway Safety Conference Aims to Drive Change

March 7, 2025 (Lincoln, Neb.) – In 2024, an estimated 251 people lost their lives on Nebraska roads—the highest rate in 17 years—a stark reminder of the urgent need for highway safety efforts.

To address this critical issue, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) Highway Safety Office (HSO) hosted its annual Highway Safety Conference on Feb. 19-20 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney. The event brought together law enforcement, safety training employees, local health departments, healthcare workers, and other highway safety advocates, educators, and policymakers to share life-saving information and strengthen partnerships in pursuit of zero traffic fatalities in Nebraska.

The event featured sessions on public participation and youth engagement in traffic safety. A highlight was hearing directly from young drivers. Students from David City High School's chapter of Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) and Grand Island Senior High shared firsthand insights into teen driving habits and what it would take to get their peers to buckle up and put their phones down.

"Despite knowing the dangers, many teens still find themselves looking at their phones while driving," said Bill Kovarik, highway safety administrator of NDOT's Highway Safety Office. "They often feel a sense of obligation to respond to calls or texts from their parents, even in critical moments. Conversations with teen drivers are crucial, especially as we work to deliver safety messages to them. We need to understand where and how they access this information."

In 2023, an alarming 81 percent of teen traffic fatalities in Nebraska involved individuals not wearing seat belts, according to NDOT's HSO, even though drivers and passengers are 45 percent more likely to survive a crash if they are wearing their seat belts. As a state, Nebraska ranks 49th out of 50 in seat belt usage. This underscores the necessity for ongoing engagement and education to promote safer driving habits among peers

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A panel also addressed current legislative efforts to improve the safety of Nebraska's road users, including NDOT's safety bill, LB600, which would enhance the state's existing Move Over Law, add speed safety cameras specifically in work and school zones and implement adaptive speed limits – which involves using technology to adjust speed limits based on real-time conditions. Other legislative initiatives discussed include LB594, a proposed hands-free bill that would restrict holding devices while operating a motor vehicle, and discussion on last year's bill allowing motorcyclists to not wear helmets – which has resulted in an increase of motorcycle fatalities.

Additional discussions covered grant writing, traffic safety as a public health concern and safety initiatives like impaired driving prevention, child passenger safety and eliminating distracted driving.

For more information on NDOT's highway safety initiatives, visit [NDOT Highway Safety Office](#).

#NDOT#

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