

Dane County Traffic Safety Commission

Co-Chairs

Sgt. Dennis Sieren
Dane Co. Sheriff's Office
(608) 284-6876

Cheryl Wittke

Safe Communities Madison-Dane Co.
(608) 256-6713

Members

AAA Wisconsin
American Family Children's
Hospital / Safe Kids
Belleville Police Dept.
Blue Mounds Police Dept.
CESA 2 Driver's Education
Cottage Grove Police Dept.
Cross Plains Police Dept.
Dane Co. Court Commissioner
Dane Co. District Attorney's Office
Dane Co. EMS
Dane Co. Highway & Transportation
Dane Co. Sheriff's Office
DeForest Police Dept
DeForest Public Works
Fitchburg Police Dept.
Fitchburg Public Works
Fitchburg Traffic Engineering
Greater Madison MPO
Madison Metro
Madison Municipal Court
Madison Police Dept.
Madison Traffic Engineering
Marshall Police Dept.
McFarland Police Dept.
Middleton Police Dept.
Monona Police Dept.
Mt. Horeb Police Dept.
Oregon Police Dept.
Public Health Madison & Dane Co.
Safe Communities Madison-Dane Co.
Shorewood Hills Police Dept.
SSM Health
Stoughton Police Dept.
Sun Prairie Pedestrian Task Force
Sun Prairie Police Dept.
Sun Prairie Public Works
Town of Madison Police Dept.
UW Extension
UW Health Trauma Centers
UW Police Dept.
UW TOPS Laboratory
UW Transportation Services
Verona Police Dept.
Waunakee Police Dept.
WI Bike Federation
WI Dept. of Transportation/
Bureau of Traffic Safety
WI State Laboratory of Hygiene
WI State Patrol

August 12, 2021

For Immediate Release (*See interview opportunities, page 2*)

For more information, contact:
Cheryl Wittke, (608) 256-6713
Executive Director, Safe Communities of
Madison - Dane County

2021 Brings Record Number of Traffic Fatalities for Dane County

The number of traffic fatalities this year in Dane County already has exceeded the total for all of 2020, according to officials from the Dane County Traffic Safety Commission (TSC). This includes an unusually high number of pedestrians struck by motor vehicles.

Officials with the TSC report that thirty-five persons have died so far this year in Dane County crashes, more than all of 2020. Twenty-five of this year's deaths were within the months of April, May, June, and July. Seven of this year's fatal crashes involved pedestrians, including six in Madison and one in Sun Prairie.

"This is an immediate public health issue," said Sgt. Dennis Sieren, Dane County Sheriff's Office and co-chair of the Dane County TSC. "We are extremely concerned about the increasing number of fatalities, despite local efforts to improve safety. Too many area families have lost a friend or loved one under tragic circumstances that could have been prevented."

Even though 2020 saw a drop in traffic volume across the county from the prior year, traffic officials started to see an increase in total crashes and serious injuries. Despite less traffic, at the end of 2020 Dane County had *more* fatalities than the prior year, and this trend is accelerating in 2021.

Fatal crash data reported by city and county agencies is reviewed and analyzed quarterly by the Traffic Safety Commission. Results for the second quarter of 2021 showed:

(Continued next page)

Dane County Traffic Safety Commission

(continued from page 1)

- Over half of crashes resulting in fatalities involved a driver using alcohol or other drugs.
- Three fatality crashes involved a semi-truck or other commercial motor vehicle.
- Four fatal crashes involved a pedestrian struck by a car or semi-trailer truck.
- Speeding was involved in eight of the fatal crashes, with a maximum speed of 92 mpg in a 35-mpg zone. In all of 2020 there were twelve speed-related fatalities, more than double the previous year (5).
- Twelve fatal crashes involved only one vehicle or motorcycle.

“We’re not sure why the significant increase in fatalities,” said Cheryl Wittke, TSC co-chair and executive director of Safe Communities of Madison - Dane County. “One theory involves how the behavior of drivers changed during the height of the pandemic last year. Vehicle volume was down significantly, and drivers increased speed. Perhaps some drivers accustomed to fewer vehicles on the roads have not adjusted their speed and fully resumed defensive driving skills as roads became more congested.”

“The common denominator for most crashes is risky driver behavior,” added Sieren, noting that distracted or inattentive driving, such as use of cell phone or looking away from the road, is likely a contributing factor in many of the fatalities. “Everyone needs to be more aware of their surroundings and more vigilant about safety threats.” He offered these reminders:

- Slow down. Know the speed limit and stay under it.
- Keep your distance from vehicles in front of you.
- Watch for vehicles turning ahead with or without signaling.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs before or while driving.
- Make sure all people are wearing seat belts or motorcycle riders wearing helmets.
- Yield to pedestrians, even if they are crossing inappropriately.
- Pull over to use the phone, eat, smoke, or reach into the back seat.

-30-

1. **News Media Interview Opportunities (call directly):**

Dennis Sieren, Sergeant, Dane County Sheriff’s Office and Co-chair, Dane County Traffic Safety Commission (for information on the Traffic Safety Commission or the fatality data and its implications). Contact Dennis at (608) 284-6876 or 284-6800.

2. **Mike Steffes**, Chief of Police, City of Sun Prairie and TSC member (for perspective on how increasing fatalities affects Dane County communities outside Madison and how a local task force is addressing pedestrian aspects. Contact Jake King, Communications and Diversity Strategist, City of Sun Prairie, (608) 332-5397.

3. **Hee Soo Jung, MD, FACS, FCCM**, Director, Surgical Critical Care, Program Director, Surgical Critical Fellowship, Division of Acute Care Surgery and Regional General Surgery, Department of Surgery, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (for perspectives on human aspects of fatalities on victim families, health care providers, and impact on the health care system). Contact: Tricia McVay weekdays at (608) 265-9574 or mcvay@surgery.wisc.edu.