

# Dane County Traffic Safety Commission

## Co-Chairs

### **Sgt. Matt Meyer**

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

### **Cheryl Wittke**

Safe Communities Madison-Dane Co.  
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## 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

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.

Mount 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 Services

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 Alcohol Policy Project

WI Bike Federation

WI Dept. of Transportation/  
Bureau of Traffic Safety

WI State Laboratory of Hygiene

WI State Patrol

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

For more information, contact:

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Executive Director, Safe Communities of  
Madison - Dane County

## **Alcohol-Related Traffic Crash Injuries Spike in Dane County**

Dane County experienced a much higher number of motor vehicle crashes related to alcohol use during the first six months of this year, according to a new report from the Dane County Traffic Safety Commission (TSC). In total, 80 crashes from January to June involved alcohol use, compared to the previous five-year average of 57, a 41% increase. These include crashes resulting in injury or death.

Sixteen Dane County crashes resulted in deaths, based on the report at the quarterly meeting of the TSC, a coalition of 48 county public and private organizations monitoring and developing plans to improve traffic safety. Eleven of these 16 fatal crashes involved alcohol use. The blood alcohol levels in all these fatal crashes exceeded the legal limit of .08 and in some were three times higher. TSC Co-chair Cheryl Wittke noted that the actual number of fatal crashes attributed to alcohol use likely is much higher because blood alcohol levels are not yet known when reports are filed from the scene of crashes.

Most of the Dane County fatal crashes between January and June of this year occurred outside Madison, including those in Fitchburg, the village of Blue Mounds, and towns of Oregon, Vienna, Dunkirk, Rutland and Albion. Two crashes were in the town of Dunn.

"We continue to see excessive use of alcohol as a factor in most crashes," said Wittke. "Yet it does not have to happen. We can't lose sight of the impact these crashes have, especially on the victims and their families but  
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also on other drivers, first responders and medical caregivers. These are devastating for everyone involved.”

Every day for ten years, Brian and Christine Dunleavy, formerly of Madison, have lived with the consequences of losing their son. Twenty-year-old Conor Dunleavy was killed in the town of Sun Prairie when rear-ended by a drunk driver on the way from one bar to another and driving 100 m.p.h. The driver had no life-threatening injuries and served a seven-year jail sentence.

“Birthdays, holidays, the anniversary of Conor’s death--these are especially difficult,” said Brian Dunleavy, a former social studies teacher at O’Keefe Middle School. “We live in a state where heavy drinking has become normalized. Conor’s death was completely avoidable. I’m not telling people not to drink, but they need to have an alternative plan on how to get home if they drink to excess. Nobody should have to go through what we have.”

Many TSC members have existing programs to discourage drinking and driving. Examples include the Dane County District Attorney’s Victim Impact Panel, for which Brian Dunleavy is a frequent presenter. The panel talks to community groups and provides support for other victims.

Thirteen Dane County police departments and the Sheriff’s Office, all TSC-members, have grant funding from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Safety to cover police overtime for high visibility traffic enforcement efforts aimed at curbing dangerous driving behaviors and encouraging positive driving habits and compliance with the laws. Groupings of different communities’ police departments hold these efforts on the same days for high visibility enforcement.

The Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project (WAPP), also a TSC member, emphasizes the need to reduce excessive alcohol use, especially during fairs and festivals. “Wisconsin has a proud tradition of bringing community together, but we need to make sure we aren’t overserving alcohol, as that can lead to devastating outcomes,” said WAPP Director Maureen Busalacchi. “It’s time to get serious about making sure people are not served if they are already intoxicated as it’s against the law and very problematic for public safety. Some event sponsors already are paying attention to making sure no one overserves festival goers, but event staff turnover or the use of volunteer alcohol servers may result in a need for more attention on what to look for.” WAPP offers [guidelines on its website](#) for outdoor events.

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Cheryl Wittke acknowledges much more needs to be done. “Dane County TSC members are collaborating through their Impaired Driving Workgroup on new county-wide strategies to be announced later this year and implemented in 2023,” she said. “By working together, we can have even a stronger impact.”

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The following members of the Traffic Safety Commission may be contacted for comment directly if desired:

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- 2) Impact on victims and families: Brian Dunleavy, [brianjosephdunleavy@gmail.com](mailto:brianjosephdunleavy@gmail.com). (608) 332-0979.
- 3) Risks of alcohol use at outdoor festivals, fairs: Maureen Busalacchi, Director, Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project, [mbusalacchi@mcw.edu](mailto:mbusalacchi@mcw.edu), (608) 335-0005.

