

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.

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Dane Co. District Attorney's Office

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Dane Co. Highway & Transportation

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Fitchburg Public Works

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Madison Municipal Court

Madison Police Dept.

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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.

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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: Cheryl Wittke, (608) 256-6713
Executive Director, Safe Communities of Madison - Dane County**

Eight of the ten fatal Dane County motor vehicle crashes in the first three months of 2022 involved driver use of alcohol or drugs, including marijuana, according to Sgt. Matt Meyer, Dane County Sheriff's Office and co-chair for the county's Traffic Safety Commission (TSC). It was reported at the recent quarterly TSC meeting that from January to March 2022, fourteen persons died in those ten crashes. Most fatalities occurred outside Madison in the village of Blue Mounds and towns of Vienna, Dunkirk, Rutland, and Albion.

This frightening trend is familiar to Jessica Quamme, TSC member and sergeant with the Middleton Police Department. A certified Drug Recognition Expert, Sgt. Quamme is called to crash scenes involving drug use.

"Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs not only increases risk of death or serious injury to a driver and passengers but also endangers other unsuspecting motorists sharing the roads," said Sgt. Quamme, who also noted the Middleton Police Department has seen an uptick in arrests for OWI (operating a vehicle while intoxicated).

In all first quarter Dane County crashes involving alcohol, driver blood alcohol levels exceeded the legal limit of .08, and in several cases, it was more than twice as high.

"When that high, it suggests frequent heavy drinking. A casual drinker may pass out before reaching that level," Sgt. Quamme said. "A driver under the influence is less likely to take action to avoid or reduce crash impact, increasing chances of a worse outcome."

Three of the first quarter's eight fatal crashes involving substance use showed blood evidence of THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana. In several crashes involving THC, there also was evidence of alcohol use.

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TSC co-chair Cheryl Wittke said a particularly alarming trend noted in the first quarter of this year was a 34% increase in the combined total of all fatalities and serious injuries. From January to March 2022, 51 individuals died or suffered severe injuries, compared to the previous five-year average of 38.

Wittke said TSC member law enforcement agencies have a number of programs already in place to reduce crashes specifically related to alcohol or drug use. This includes the Dane County Sheriff's Office and municipal police departments who received OWI grants from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to increase enforcement for identifying impaired drivers.

Meyer also noted that more of the fatal crashes involved drivers not using seatbelts. "This is especially true of drivers impaired by alcohol or drugs, who are more likely to avoid belting up," he said. "Of the ten fatal crashes in the first quarter, half of drivers were not wearing seatbelts. Alcohol or drug use combined with no seatbelts happens far too often."

The increasing number of drivers using alcohol and drugs and those not using safety restraints is a major focus of two of four TSC-member workgroups developing county-wide solutions to address these and other traffic safety concerns prioritized by the TSC. The groups are meeting this year to identify strategies they hope to implement in 2023.

[See attached jpg files for accompanying graphics]

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

- 1) Crash trends and Traffic Safety Commission: Sgt. Matt Meyer, Dane County Sheriff's Office, co-chair, Dane County Traffic Safety Commission, meyer.matt@danesherriff.com (608) 284-6876.
- 2) Traffic Safety Commission role/membership: Cheryl Wittke, Exec. Director, Safe Communities of Madison - Dane County and TSC co-chair. cwittke@safercommunity.net, (608) 256-6713.
- 3) Traffic crash data/trends: Jeremy Kloss, Program and Policy Analyst, WI Bureau of Transportation Safety and Technical Services, jeremy.kloss@dot.wi.gov, (262) 957-7697.
- 4) Effects of alcohol and drugs on crashes.: Sgt. Jessica Quamme, Traffic and Grant Coordinator, Middleton Police Department. jquamme@ci.middleton.wi.us, (608) 824-7300.