

Two studies show that in 2008 the rate of deaths in automobile accidents dropped by as much as 10% across the U.S. That's about 3000 lives that were not lost in 2008 to traffic accidents. 3000 lives!

Wow.

So what is causing this reduction in deaths on our roads and highways? Well right now it is difficult to say for sure but here are some ideas about what might be going on.

Gas Prices Last Summer - When gas prices shot up, two things happened that are significant. First of all, people began to slow down to get better gas mileage. In fact, did you know that a full sized pickup truck will get around 27.5 miles a gallon when driven at a continuous speed of 45 mph? And it is proven that going slower gives motorists a better chance at both avoiding and surviving a wreck. The second change that occurred is that people started driving less miles.

But the statistics show that the number of deaths per mile driven also dropped.

So this doesn't explain everything.

Cars Are Safer - Lately car companies have been going beyond just what the law requires in terms of safety and coming up with and installing new technologies. They have learned that safety is an important selling tool and this is beginning to have a positive impact on society as a whole.

An example of this currently is the increasing presence of stability and anti-rollover technologies in vehicles.

This will be mandated in new vehicles by 2012 but many new vehicles have it now anyway.

Crash Test Data - Another impact on making cars safer has been the sharing of safety data with the public. The NHTSA and the IIHS have been making their crash test ratings available on line and people are using them and looking it up before they buy a car.

This has forced the car makers to focus on this when designing new cars.

A good example of this would be the side impact results on smaller cars.

This year an IIHS study found that 11 of 21 small car models earned good ratings while in 2006 just 3 of 19 small car models achieved this result.

Seatbelt Laws - The effort to get more motorists to wear seatbelts has finally gained real momentum. The NHSTA recently found that 83% of motorists wear their seat belts and that is the highest rating in history.

I think this good news on our highways is something we should all be proud of and share with one another. People often use the phrase "If it saves just one life..... it will be worth it". In this case over 3000 lives were saved in 2008.

In some ways that is just mind boggling.

3000 lives.

Congratulations USA!