



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Kentucky Officials Announce Increase in Highway Fatalities Last Year**  
*Half of 2023 fatalities were unbelted*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 16, 2024)** – Highway fatalities in Kentucky increased in 2023 with 813 deaths, up from 744 in 2022 and the highest since 2016. To complement infrastructure improvements and enforcement campaigns to improve safety on Kentucky highways, state transportation officials encourage motorists to practice safe driving behaviors. With more than half of reported fatalities involving unbelted drivers and passengers, Kentuckians are reminded to buckle up every trip, every time.

“Any life lost on a Kentucky road is one too many, especially those that could have been prevented,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “We can all commit to buckling up, staying aware and driving sober and distraction-free, and Team Kentucky is committed to continuing to build safer bridges and roadways so we can reach our goal of zero traffic deaths.”

According to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet’s (KYTC) Office of Highway Safety and Kentucky State Police (KSP), of the 813 fatalities, 51% were not wearing a seat belt and 16% involved alcohol. Approximately 33% involved speeding or aggressive drivers, and 20% involved driver distraction. Pedestrians and bicyclists accounted for 137 deaths and motorcyclists accounted for 105.

“We’re asking motorists and passengers to commit to safe driving behaviors when behind the wheel, such as buckling up, putting the phone down, obeying the speed limit and driving sober,” said KYTC Secretary Jim Gray. “This helps keep our roadways safe, not only for those in vehicles, but for all road users, such as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists.”

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#), one of the most effective ways to help reduce highway traffic deaths is to combine public awareness campaigns with high-visibility enforcement efforts.

“The last thing we want to do is notify someone that their loved one has been in a fatal crash. So, if we can potentially save a life by enforcing traffic laws, we’ll do it,” said KSP Capt. Paul Blanton. “At the end of the day, we want everyone to make it home safely.”

In an effort to help families pay tribute to loved ones killed on Kentucky highways, the newly launched KYTC Office of Highway Safety website features a new addition titled [“Memory Lane”](#) – a digital memorial space created for immediate family members to post stories and pay tribute to loved ones lost in traffic crashes.

“Highway safety is about more than numbers – it’s about people,” said Secretary Gray. “Our hope is that Memory Lane will help families honor their loved ones and, in turn, inspire others reading these stories to make safe choices when behind the wheel or riding along.”

According to [NHTSA](#), wearing a seat belt gives motorists the best chance of preventing injury or death if involved in a crash. Properly fastened seat belts contact the strongest parts of the body, such as the chest, hips and shoulders. A seat belt spreads the force of a crash over a wide area of the body, putting less stress on any one part, and allows the body to slow down with the crash, extending the time when the crash forces are felt by the occupant.

“We encourage motorists to make safe choices on the road because it’s the right thing to do, not just because it is the law,” said Capt. Blanton. “Some may see it as an inconvenience, but traffic laws are in place for a reason – to save lives.”

So far in 2024, preliminary numbers indicate 170 roadway deaths, down 13.7% compared with the same time last year.

KYTC continues to implement infrastructure projects to improve safety for all users by preventing deaths and serious injuries along our highways, roads and streets. A state and federally funded pilot project is planned to begin this summer to test innovative technology solutions that detect and deter wrong-way crashes along select interstate ramps before implementation on six corridors in Fayette and Jefferson counties. Roadway improvements, such as striping and additional signage, are part of a comprehensive effort to curb wrong-way crashes statewide.

Additionally, in 2023, the KYTC Office of Highway Safety implemented the High Five Rural Traffic Safety Project (High Five) – a 12-month public safety initiative to increase seat belt use and decrease serious crashes in five rural Kentucky counties. High Five strategies focus on education, enforcement and engineering. Law enforcement officials promote seat belt use and explain how it saves lives through traffic safety checkpoints, school programs and other community outreach activities. Local and state engineers and traffic safety professionals work together to identify roadway design solutions.

Based on KYTC crash data, the following counties participated last year, which resulted in increased seat belt usage: Bourbon County, Grayson County, Knott County, Madison County and Perry County. Counties are currently being selected for 2024.

**Historical Kentucky highway fatality statistics:**

<b>2016</b>	834
<b>2017</b>	782
<b>2018</b>	724

<b>2019</b>	732
<b>2020</b>	780
<b>2021</b>	806
<b>2022</b>	744
<b>2023</b>	813

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**Editor's note:** See [attachment](#) for county-specific data. Download graphic for [Facebook/Instagram](#) or [X](#).

