

As states raise speed limits, road deaths rise, report finds

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(HealthDay)—Increasing speed limits may be to blame for an increase in road deaths on America's highways and byways, a new study suggests.

Over the past 20 years, an estimated 33,000 additional fatalities occurred as states kept raising [speed limits](#), according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety report, released Tuesday.

In 2013 alone, there were 1,900 additional deaths, canceling out the number of lives saved from front airbags that year, the institute's report found.

"Since 2013, speeds have only become more extreme, and the trend shows no sign of abating," Charles Farmer, vice president for research and statistical services at the institute, said in an institute news release. "We hope state lawmakers will keep in mind the deadly consequences of higher speeds when they consider raising [speed] limits."

But the report did not prove that higher speed

limits actually caused those additional fatalities.

In the study, Farmer examined the effects of speed limit increases in 41 states between 1993 and 2013. He found that each 5 mile-per-hour increase in the [maximum speed limit](#) was associated to a 4 percent increase in road deaths. That increase was 8 percent on interstates and freeways, the roads most affected by state speed limits, the findings showed.

After accounting for a number of other factors, Farmer calculated that higher speed limits led to 33,000 additional deaths over those two decades. However, the actual number is likely higher, he added.

Farmer said the study did not include speed limit increases over the past three years. In 2013, only Texas and Utah had speed limits above 75 mph, but five more states now have limits over 75 mph, and other states have raised their limits from 65 mph to 70 mph.

The findings are troubling, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA).

"Speeding is often a forgotten issue in [highway safety](#). But the truth is that excessive speed contributes to a tremendous proportion of all traffic fatalities," Erik Strickland, director of federal relations at GHSA, said in a statement.

"Increasing speed limits has the potential to exacerbate this problem. We know that crashes are more deadly as speeds increase. In addition, most drivers treat maximum speeds as a minimum target," Strickland said.

"This new research reinforces earlier studies and provides clear evidence of the negative safety implications from increasing speed limits," he added.

More information: The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has more on [driving safety](#).

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