



Traffic Safety Facts Banner

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF SPEEDING AND UNSAFE DRIVING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR: 2002

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) first conducted a study on the driving age public's attitudes and behaviors about speeding and unsafe (or aggressive) driving in 1997. NHTSA conducted a second survey on this topic in 2002 to collect updated data on the nature and scope of the speeding and aggressive driving problems. Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of drivers age 16 and over, to determine how the public perceives the seriousness of speeding and aggressive driving, and what countermeasures the public will accept to control these problems.

Speeding

Speeding is a pervasive behavior with about three-quarters of drivers in the survey reporting they drove over the speed limit on all types of roads within the past month.

A majority of drivers of all ages admit to speeding.

- At least eight of ten younger drivers report speeding at least monthly on each road type
- Six in ten drivers age 65 or older report speeding on all road types
- Males are 50 percent more likely than females to drive over the posted speed limit.

Perceived Likelihood of Crash at Different Speeds

The majority of drivers (58%) feel that someone driving at least 10 MPH over the posted speed limit would be at least somewhat more likely than someone traveling at the limit to have a crash. Fewer drivers perceive that a crash is likely for drivers exceeding the limit by less than 10 MPH.

Perceived Threat of Others Speeding

While many drivers believe that the speed limits on interstates should generally be higher, 68 percent of survey respondents feel that *other drivers'* speeding is a major threat to their own personal safety. Perceptions of this threat increase significantly with age, from just 48 percent of drivers age 16-20 believing speeding by others is a threat, to 86 percent of those age 65 or older. More than three-quarters of drivers feel that it is at least somewhat important that something be done to reduce speeding on all road types. This finding suggests a strong "*it's not me, it's the other guy who is a problem*" mentality among many drivers.

Unsafe and Aggressive Driving

While speeding is the most common unsafe behavior on the road, other unsafe behaviors account for a sizable proportion of motor vehicle crashes. Drivers reported doing other unsafe and aggressive driving behaviors "*at least sometimes.*"

- Entering an intersection just as the light turned from yellow to red (40 percent)
- Rolling stops at stop signs (30 percent)
- Making angry, insulting, or obscene gestures towards another driver (12 percent)
- Cutting in front of other drivers (10 percent)

Drivers under age 21 are much more likely than older drivers to engage in these behaviors, with 29 percent saying they cut in front of other drivers, 24 percent making obscene or angry gestures towards other motorists, and 17 percent using the shoulder to pass in heavy traffic.

Perceived Change in Aggressive Driving in Others

Drivers believe that others are driving as or more aggressively now as they were one year ago. Specifically, compared to a year ago, 40 percent of drivers feel other drivers are driving more aggressively; 52 percent of drivers feel other drivers are driving as aggressively; and only 6 percent feel other drivers are driving less aggressively.

Perceived Threat of Different Driving Behaviors

The survey asked drivers how much of a threat three different unsafe driving behaviors are to their personal safety. Virtually all (97 percent) of drivers feel that when other

drivers run red lights it is a major threat to themselves and their family; 83 percent feel that traffic weaving is a major threat; and 58 percent see rolling stops at stop signs as a major threat.

Police Enforcement

While speeding is reported as the most common unsafe driving behavior drivers see on roads, drivers believe that enforcement is too lax with the other unsafe driving behaviors. For example, 60 percent of drivers believe there is too little enforcement for tailgating, and 57 percent believe there is lax enforcement for weaving. On the other hand, only 41 percent report too little enforcement for speeding. Younger drivers are most likely to believe there is too much enforcement of most of the unsafe driving behaviors, especially speeding. Twenty-two percent of those under age 30 reported that they believe there is too much police enforcement of speeding as compared to 8 percent of those age 30 or older.

Appropriateness of Photo Enforcement

At least two-thirds of drivers feel that photo enforcement would be a good idea in all of the traffic violation scenarios identified. The greatest support for automated photo enforcement comes for the following violations:

- Drivers passing a school bus (82 percent)
- Speeding in a school zone (78 percent)
- Trying to beat a train at a railroad crossing (78 percent)
- Running red lights (75 percent).

HOW TO ORDER

To order *Vol. 2--National Survey of Speeding and Unsafe Driving Attitudes and Behaviors: 2002*, (81 pages), prepared by The Gallup Organization, write to the office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NTI-130, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, fax (202) 366-7096 or download from <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/> Paul J. Tremont, Ph.D., was the project officer.

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