

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

MOTOR VEHICLE FATALITIES IN 1996 WERE 12 PERCENT HIGHER ON INTERSTATES, FREEWAYS IN 12 STATES THAT RAISED SPEED LIMITS

ARLINGTON, VA – October 10, 1997 – Five hundred more people died in motor vehicle crashes in the last 9 months of 1996 than would otherwise have been expected in the 12 states that raised speed limits on interstates and freeways between December 8, 1995 and April 1, 1996, a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study estimates.

Researchers compared the numbers of motor vehicle occupant deaths between April and December 1996 in 12 states with corresponding fatality counts for the same 9-month periods in 1990-95, as well as fatality counts from 18 states that didn't change maximum speed limits during 1996 or that raised speed limits on fewer than 10 percent of urban interstate roadway.

The Institute estimates a 12 percent increase in fatalities on interstates and freeways and a 6 percent increase on all roads in these 12 states.

"The actual increase in highway fatalities for the entire nation was probably greater than the study sample indicates," says Adrian Lund, Institute senior vice president. "This is because the 500 additional deaths on all roads represents a 9-month period only and doesn't include deaths in another 12 states that raised limits later in the year."

Repeal of Maximum Speed Limit Brought Higher Speeds: Earlier Institute research confirmed that travel speeds are higher on roads in states that raised limits after Congress in late 1995 repealed the national maximum speed limit. The 12 states the Institute studied raised speed limits to 70 mph or higher on rural interstates and to 60, 65, or 70 mph on urban interstates and freeways. Some states,

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such as Texas, raised speed limits even on two-lane highways. Montana doesn't post a numeric speed limit at all for cars during the daytime.

"It's clear from this study that the current round of speed limit increases — like increases on rural interstates in the 1980s — is costing hundreds of lives per year," Lund says. "And the cost could go up in future years because past research shows that actual speeds continue to rise in the years following a change in speed limit."

Speeding is one of the most prevalent reported factors associated with crashes. It reduces the time drivers have to avoid crashes and increases the likelihood of crashing and the severity of crashes that do occur. "We know that when speed limits are raised," Lund says, "drivers who exceeded the old speed limits will exceed the higher limits, too, because people take note of the limits and then travel faster, at speeds at which they believe they won't get a ticket."

**One-page attachment follows
this two-page press release.**

Speed Limit Changes Late 1995/Early 1996 in 12 States

State	Date of Change	Rural Interstates		Urban Interstates/Freeways	
		Old Limit (mph)	New Limit (mph)	Old Limit (mph)	New Limit (mph)
Arizona	Dec. 8, 1995	65	75	55	no change
California	Jan. 7, 1996	65	70	55	65
Kansas	Mar. 7, 1996	65	70	55	70
Mississippi	Feb.29, 1996	65	70	55	70
Missouri	Mar. 13, 1996	65	70	55	60
Montana	Dec. 8, 1995	65	none	55	none
Nevada	Dec. 8, 1995	65	75	55	65
Oklahoma	Dec. 15, 1995	65	70	55	60
	Aug. 29, 1996		75		70
S. Dakota	Apr. 1, 1996	65	75	55	65
Texas	Dec. 8, 1995	65	70	55	70
Washington	Mar. 15, 1996	65	70	55	60
Wyoming	Dec. 8, 1995	65	75	55	60

Motor Vehicle Occupant Fatalities on Interstates/Freeways
April-December, 1990-96

