

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

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AGGRESSIVE DRIVING WORSE, NEW YORK SURVEY SHOWS

A new survey of New York State drivers confirms what many people already know: Aggressive driving is getting worse, and young drivers are the worst culprits. "It comes through that young drivers are the most problematic," says Dr. Anne McCartt, Deputy Director of the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research, University at Albany, New York. "On every question they were significantly more likely to say they engaged in aggressive driving."

The survey, which was conducted for the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee by the Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research at Albany and Fact Finders, Inc., polled 800 drivers licensed in New York State. The survey respondents are clearly concerned about this issue: 59 percent named behaviors associated with aggressive driving as the biggest traffic safety problem (some of the behaviors mentioned included speeding, unsafe lane changes, and unsafe passing). Eighty-eight percent said that aggressive driving is a problem on the roads they drive, while 72 percent said drivers today are more aggressive than they were five years ago.

One of the most revealing questions in the story asked for information about the motorists' own driving behavior. While only 3 percent said they drive aggressively "most of the time," 40 percent said they drive aggressively when they are late or in a hurry and 17 percent when they're angered by another driver's actions.

A third (29%) of drivers admitted to shouting or swearing at another driver. Drivers also confessed to: changing lanes in an unsafe manner (22%), tailgating or flashing high beams at a slow-moving driver (17%), going through a red light (16%), making an obscene gesture (13%), preventing another driver from passing (9%), and intentionally cutting off another vehicle (5%). "The most surprising part is that 16 percent went through a red light in the last few months," McCartt said. "That's a lot of people."

Bad behavior definitely declined with age, the survey showed. Nearly half (44%) of drivers 16-24 admitted to changing lanes unsafely and a third (30%) had tailgated or flashed high beams. The figures for the same behaviors from drivers over 65 were only 12 and 9 percent, respectively. In addition, men were more likely than women to report that they drive aggressively and had engaged in specific aggressive behaviors.

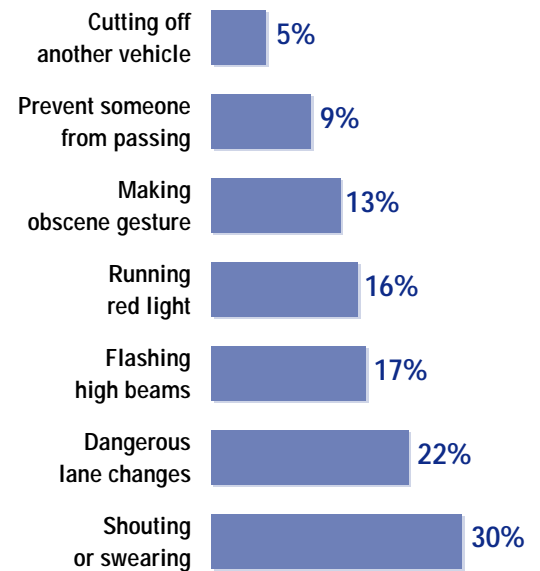
Somewhat surprisingly given their own admitted actions, more than 90 percent of New York drivers support a law that would increase penalties for drivers convicted of road rage or criminal aggressive driving.

McCartt says that although regional totals were kept, the problem does not seem to be confined to one single area. "There were some differences by region — it is perceived as a more serious problem in New York City — but the differences weren't as striking as we expected. It's not only a big city urban problem," she says.

McCartt adds, "While only 3 percent said they drive aggressively most of the time, you can't forget that New York has over 10 million drivers. So when you take three percent of them that's still a substantial number of people."

McCartt plans further research into enforcement: "We're looking to see if speed is a surrogate for other kinds of aggressive behavior," she says. "Since speed and red-light running are more easily enforced, if you catch people doing those who are also doing the other things, you're more efficient."

Behaviors Admitted by People in the Study



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A GIFT TO FIGHT ROAD RAGE

Rhode Island State Troopers now have 25,000 specially printed "Preventing Road Rage" brochures customized with their logo. The brochures will be distributed through police barracks and



given to motorists as part of the state's anti-aggressive driving campaign. From left to right, Robert P. Murray, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs for AAA Southern New England, presents the brochures to Col. Edmond S. Culhane, Rhode Island State Police Superintendent and Captain John M. LaCross of State Police Administrative Services. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety donated the customized brochures in recognition

of the strong support received from members of AAA Southern New England.

SOME SAFETY RESOLUTIONS FOR NEW YEAR'S

Are your New Year's resolutions toast by February? Here are five easy-to-keep resolutions for a safer New Year:

1. **Fasten your seat belt every time you start the car.** Yes, even if you're just backing out of the driveway. Refuse to move the vehicle until everyone else has buckled up, too.
2. **Keep alcohol out of your car.** Travel to parties in a taxi or with a sober friend, and if you have a friend who's been drinking, give them a cab ride home.
3. **Calm down!** Instead of fighting traffic, flow with it. Take a deep breath, accept reality, and

think about something pleasant. You'll arrive in a better frame of mind.

4. **Sleep more.** Before taking a long drive, sleep as long as possible the night before. If you're drowsy en route, stop for a nap. Watch out for that mid-afternoon lull — many drowsy driving crashes happen between 2 and 5 p.m.
5. **Become visible.** When biking, running, walking, or skating at night, wear reflective gear so drivers can see you.

BRITISH STUDY SHOWS DANGERS OF LEGAL DRUGS

A study by researchers at the University of Dundee, Scotland, showed a strong link between crashes and certain types of prescription drugs. The study looked at the link between traffic crashes and some commonly prescribed tranquilizers and antidepressants. The study, conducted by MEMO, the Medicines Monitoring Unit, examined 19,386 crashes over a two-year period between August, 1992 and June, 1995 seeking links with prescriptions for psychotropic drugs.

The study showed that people taking anti-anxiety benzodiazepine drugs have a significant risk of being involved in a crash. Hypnotic, or sleep-inducing, benzodiazepines, antidepressants, and other psychotropic drugs did not show any link,

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Address correspondence to Editor, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Suite 201, 1440 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005.
Telephone: 202-638-5944; Fax: 202-638-5943

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OTTO THE AUTO: AN INTERNET SAFETY SITE FOR KIDS

Otto the Auto, star of some of the Foundation's best-selling videos, has his very own web site designed just for children.

"We wanted to go for a pre-literate audience," explains Merry Banks, Manager of the Traffic Safety Department for the California State Automobile Association. "We had started a program in 1991 where Otto goes out to the schools and meets kids," she explains. The "live" Otto is a small robot-controlled car that can talk to kids and even blink his eyes. Banks says, "The feedback from the kids was so strong — 'Dear Otto, I miss you, I love you' — that we thought, if kids want so badly to continue their relationship with Otto, we can give them a virtual relationship." Banks had also been talking with Pacific Bell about their project to wire the schools to the Internet, so she and Assistant V.P. Don Patton planned to create a web page where school children could meet Otto and learn about traffic safety.

"There weren't any web sites for kids," she says. Banks is a published author of several children's books and was quite specific about wanting the site to be educational and entertaining. "The challenge is, how do you teach them and not be didactic? So the site is based on the Otto literature and on educational activities."

The colorful site (find it at <http://www.ottoclub.org>) uses very few words and lots of pictures to teach traffic safety. Topics include the proper use of seat belts, how to wear a helmet, and ways to stay safe while crossing the street. There are games like "Find the Helmet Through History" and pictures kids can print out at home and color later. For example, "On the beltway you learn about buckling up and sing buckling up songs as you drive, or play other buckle up games. We spent a long time thinking about how we could develop this special place and activities to go with it," Banks says.

Otto's web site has been popular since it first went on line. "We've received many awards," Banks says. "We received the 'best kids site' award from the Starbright Foundation, and recently received the Compass Award from the Public Relations Society of America."

But Banks isn't stopping with the web. At her daughter's school she noticed that children were



allowed to spend their free time playing CD-ROM games on the computer. So now the team is putting Otto onto a CD-ROM. It'll be a lot like the web site, but, Banks explains, "on a CD-ROM you can have more capabilities, so we'll have full animation." The Otto CD-ROM will be available early next year and will be distributed by the California State Automobile Association.



DANGERS OF LEGAL DRUGS—from page 2

with the exception of zopiclone, a sleep-inducing drug. (Anxiolytic benzodiazepines include Xanax, Valium, Librium, Serax, and Ativan; zopiclone is sold in the United States as Imovane.)

"These data strongly support the view that patients taking anxiolytic benzodiazepines or zopiclone should be advised not to drive a motor vehicle," the researchers concluded. "Doctors prescribing benzodiazepines have a responsibility to warn patients that they should not drive" while taking these drugs. The study estimated that 1,600 crashes and 110 deaths in the United Kingdom could be prevented if patients taking these drugs refrained from driving.

A LIVING MEMORIAL: GIFTS TO THE FOUNDATION

An increasing number of individuals and organizations are remembering their departed colleagues with memorial gifts to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. A tax-deductible gift to the AAA Foundation commemorates an individual in a positive way—the funds are used for educational projects designed to prevent traffic crashes and save lives.

“We decided a long time ago instead of sending flowers we would send a donation to the Foundation,” says Frank Mann, 3rd, president of AAA East

Penn. Mann has given numerous memorials on behalf of employees, board members, and others associated with AAA. “We always felt that since we’re an automobile club and our main interest for the general public is car safety, the money we donate should go for something in safety.”

Such donations are more appropriate than the customary plaque or certificate, says Mike Right of the AAA Missouri club. AAA Missouri recently gave a generous contribution to the Foundation in memory of Harold E. Thayer, a member of the club’s Board of Directors and Executive Committee. “The survivors appreciate it,” Right says. “People often don’t know what to do with plaques or certificates. A gift that helps others means a lot to the family.”