

"Road Rage" On the Rise, AAA Foundation Reports

Reported Aggressive Driving Incidents

Year	Incidents
1990	1129
1991	1297
1992	1478
1993	1555
1994	1669
1995	1708
1996	1800*

*Projected value for 1996

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Aggressive Driving News Release

Aggressive driving has progressively increased during the 1990s, indicates a study sponsored by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The study analyzed 10,037 police reports and newspaper stories about traffic incidents that led to violence and was prepared by Mizell & Company, an international security firm in Bethesda, Maryland. Reports of violent traffic incidents have increased nearly 7 percent per year since 1990.

"Yet this is only the small tip of a very large iceberg," says David K. Willis, President of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "For every aggressive driving incident serious enough to result in a police report or newspaper article, there are hundreds or thousands more which never got reported to the authorities."

The study also found that events precipitating violent incidents are often remarkably trivial and the people involved are often just ordinary citizens. "People have been shot because they drove too slowly or played the radio too loud," Willis says. "But violent traffic disputes are rarely the result of a single incident. Rather, they seem to be the result of personal attitudes and the accumulation of stress in the motorist's life."

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety advises motorists to be alert for potentially dangerous or competitive situations and to avoid them.

- Don't take your eyes off the road.
- Avoid eye contact with an aggressive driver
- Stay cool -- don't react to provocation
- Keep away from drivers behaving erratically

In addition, better enforcement of traffic regulations could prevent many such incidents before they happen.

A full report will be published early next year. A summary of the findings is also available at this site. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a not-for-profit charitable organization funded by donations from AAA and CAA clubs and members. It is devoted to preventing crashes and saving lives through research and education.

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**Summary of Aggressive Driving Study
from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety**

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Reports of violent traffic incidents have increased nearly 7 percent per year since 1990. "Yet this is only the small tip of a very large iceberg," says David K. Willis, President of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "For every aggressive driving incident serious enough to result in a police report or newspaper article, there are hundreds or thousands more which never got reported to the authorities."

This study is based on 10,037 separate incidents of aggressive driving between January 1, 1990 and September 1, 1996, assembled by the international security firm of Mizell & Co. from police reports and newspaper stories. The reports are

only a partial sample of incidents, and not all factors are known about all incidents. Gathering a comprehensive collection of all police-reported aggressive driving incidents would be a formidable task. Therefore, these results constitute only the "tip of the iceberg" and do not represent the full extent of the problem.

In the reports from the six years studied, a total of 12,828 people were injured or killed as the result of aggressive driving (218 killed, 12,610 injured), including 94 children under the age of 15. The number of reported incidents has increased every year since 1990, at an average annual rate of nearly 7 percent.

Who Are Aggressive Drivers?

The majority of perpetrators are males between the ages of 18 and 26. However, in hundreds of reported cases the perpetrator was 26 to 50 years old, and in 86 known cases the driver was between 50 and 75 years old.

There is no one profile of an "aggressive driver." Most are relatively young, poorly educated males with criminal records, histories of violence, and drug or alcohol problems, and many have recently suffered an emotional or professional setback. However, hundreds of others are successful men and women with no such histories.

While most of the drivers were male, 413 of the recorded incidents, or approximately 4 percent, were female. Women used their vehicle as a weapon in 285 cases. In 31 known cases, women attacked police officers, usually while the officer was attempting to issue a traffic citation.

What Causes Aggressive Driving?

The precipitating incidents are often remarkably trivial. Stated reasons for violent traffic disputes include arguments over parking spaces, cutting another motorist off or refusing to allow passing, minor traffic crashes, obscene gestures, loud music, overuse of the horn, slow driving, tailgating, failure to use a turn signal, and similar behaviors. For example, a teenager who murdered a passenger in another vehicle said, "We was dissed."

However, violent traffic disputes are rarely the result of a single incident, but rather are the cumulative result of a series of stressors in the motorist's life. The traffic incident that turns violent is often "the last straw."

How Many Incidents Involve Guns?

The most popular weapons used in traffic altercations are firearms and motor vehicles. In approximately 44 percent of the violent traffic altercations, the perpetrator used a weapon such as a firearm, knife, club, or tire iron. In 23 percent the aggressive driver used the vehicle as a weapon, and in 12 percent a vehicle and a standard weapon. More unusual cases include pepper spray, eggs, golf clubs, and in one instance a crossbow.

Types of Attacks

In at least 94 cases, men and women have directed their automobiles against buildings and other properties. (This does not include "crash and rob" incidents motivated by theft.)

At least 322 incidents were related to domestic violence, and in 22 cases aggressive drivers have intentionally directed their vehicles into crowds.

In 221 cases motorists intentionally used vehicles to attack law enforcement personnel. Such incidents led to the deaths of at least 48 police officers and 38 drivers and passengers. In other incidents, drivers and passengers were killed when trying to evade police. Nearly all of the 221 incidents involved drivers or passengers who were suspected of some criminal violation.

An average of 38 violent traffic incidents each year are due to racism and interracial tension. Most begin with a small accident, disagreement, or dispute over a parking space. However, hundreds of incidents that involve people of different races are not caused or aggravated by racism.

In the end, we may very well discover that personal frustration, anger, and testosterone are the most dangerous drugs on the highway.

How Can Motorists Protect Themselves?

Never underestimate the other driver's capacity for mayhem. Be patient and keep your cool in traffic. The best way to avoid being the target of an aggressive driver is to practice basic traffic courtesy:

- Do not make obscene gestures
- Use Your Horn Sparingly
- Don't block passing lane
- Don't switch lanes without signaling
- Avoid blocking the right-hand turn lane
- Do not take more than one parking space
- Do not make obscene gestures
- If you are not disabled, don't park in a disabled space
- Do not allow your door to hit the car parked next to you
- Do not tailgate
- If you travel slowly, pull over and allow traffic to pass
- Avoid unnecessary use of high beam headlights

- Don't let the car phone distract you
- Don't stop in the road to talk with a pedestrian or other driver
- Don't inflict loud music on neighboring cars

Other Useful Attitudes:

- Assume other drivers' mistakes are not personal
- Be polite and courteous, even if the other driver isn't
- Avoid all conflict if possible. If another driver challenges you, take a deep breath and get out of the way.

Reduce your stress:

- Allow plenty of time for the trip
- Listen to soothing music
- Improve the comfort in your vehicle
- Understand that you can't control the traffic, only your reaction to it

Many otherwise peaceful motorists become enraged road warriors when they get behind the wheel. If you're one of them, be advised that (a) cars are not bullet proof; (b) a truly aggressive driver will follow you home; and (c) you've got to get out of the car eventually.

Some states have a cellular telephone number that motorists can use to report dangerous driving to the state police or highway patrol. If you have a cellular telephone, learn what the number is in your state and use it when you see a driver behaving in a threatening manner -- changing lanes often, speeding, flashing lights, tailgating, and so forth. You could prevent a tragedy.

Finally, if you are tempted to participate in a driving duel, ask yourself: "Is it worth being paralyzed or killed? Is it worth a jail sentence?" An impulsive action could ruin the rest of your life.

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