

★ ★ ★ ★ Safety Culture

Motorists Practice “Do As I Say, Not As I Do” on America’s Roads, According to the AAA Foundation’s *2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index*

Nearly Ten Percent Admit to Driving Drunk within the Past Month

Washington, D.C. – American motorists blame other motorists for unsafe driving, despite the fact many admit to doing the same dangerous practices themselves, according to a new report out today by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. For example, Americans rated drinking drivers as the most serious traffic safety issue, yet in the previous month alone, almost 10 percent of motorists admitted to driving when they thought their blood alcohol content was above the legal limit.

“Where’s the outrage? Every 13 minutes, someone dies on America’s roads – yet the nation seems complacent about these preventable tragedies,” said AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety CEO Peter Kissinger. “The *2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index* makes clear that while motorists are quick to blame the ‘other guy’ for deadly practices like drunk, aggressive or distracted driving, too often those pointing the finger are themselves, part of the problem. When almost 10 percent of motorists admit to recently driving after drinking too much alcohol, the problem is much worse than people think. We need a big red flag to focus all stakeholders on real solutions for highway safety. Instead, we seem to be waving the white flag of surrender by largely accepting the carnage of forty thousand deaths on the road each year.”

Traffic crashes are the leading killer of people from the ages of 2 to 34, with the overall death toll on U.S. roadways consistently exceeding 40,000 every single year since the early 1960s with the sole exception of 1992. With this in mind, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety launched its first-annual survey of the driving public on a wide variety of issues. Following are highlights from the report, *2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index*:

- Three out of four of motorists believed that they are more careful than others behind the wheel.
- 82 percent of motorists rated distracted driving as a serious problem, yet over half of those same individuals admitted to talking on the cell phone while driving in the past month, and 14 percent even admitted to reading or sending text messages while driving.

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Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.

- Over seven out of ten motorists rated red light running as a serious problem, yet over half of those same individuals admitted to speeding up to get through yellow lights, and 5 percent even admitted to having run a red light on purpose in the past month.
- Nearly three out of every four motorists rated speeding as a serious problem, yet 40 percent of those same individuals admitted to driving 15 mph or more over speed limit on the highway in the past month, and 14 percent even admitted to having driven 15 mph or more over the limit on a neighborhood street.

In addition to documenting the difference between what drivers say and what they actually do behind the wheel, the *2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index* also revealed:

- Nearly one of every four people interviewed reported having been injured in a crash at some point in their lives, and nearly one in three reported having had a close friend or relative permanently disabled or killed in a crash.
- Americans have virtually no idea how many people die annually in crashes. Over one in four Americans guessed that 10,000 or fewer people died annually in crashes, 14 percent guessed that the number was over 100,000, and another one in four wouldn't even venture a guess. All told, only one in three Americans said somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 people die annually in motor vehicle crashes in the U. S.

“All of us should work to build a better traffic safety culture, where more than 40,000 deaths annually is NOT considered acceptable, where in conjunction with tougher laws, safer cars and better engineering, individuals take responsibility for their own driving instead of blaming the other guy,” said Kissinger. “Known counter-measures could be put into practice today to cut the death toll on American’s roads in half. Buckle up, pass the keys to a sober driver, put down the cell phone or sandwich, slow down to legal speeds, be courteous and stay alert – it’s not rocket science, it’s common sense. As we pressure regulators, lawmakers, law enforcement officials, highway engineers and automakers to do even more to make driving safer – individual motorists – all of us – must also shoulder the responsibility and police ourselves to be safer, smarter drivers. Without such a commitment, highway deaths will continue at epidemic proportions and nothing will change.”

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Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation’s mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety commissioned NuStats LLC to conduct a random telephone survey of 2,509 U.S. adults in English and Spanish from October 25, 2007 through January 10, 2008. Statistics based on the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus approximately 2.0 percent, at the 95 percent confidence level. Statistics based on a subset of the full sample are associated with a slightly higher margin of error. Statistics cited here have a margin of error of between 2.6 and 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. The full report “2008 Traffic Safety Culture Index” is available online at www.aaafoundation.org.

