

Study looks at traffic death risks

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Eighteen-year-old males are as risky behind the wheel as 80-year-old females, says a new traffic study from Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University.

Carnegie Mellon released the traffic fatality risk data as engineers there prepared to unveil a Web site that will inform visitors about how traffic fatality risks vary by many categories, including time of day, vehicle type and driver age. The Web site, Traffic STATS (for Statistics on Travel Safety) will be presented at the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board next week in Washington.

"Generally, people measure safety only by the number of fatalities, but a much better way is to think in terms of risk, for example, fatalities per mile," said Paul Fischbeck, director of Carnegie Mellon's Center for the Study and Improvement of Regulation.

"Every year, more than five times more people die in cars than on motorcycles, but there are 30 times more deaths per mile on motorcycles than in passenger cars. Motorcycles are 30 times riskier."

Traffic STATS also showed that fatality risks are higher in the summer than in the winter, and that on a per-trip basis, 45- to 54-year-old pedestrians are four times more likely to be killed than elementary school children.

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