

# Good News About \$4 Gas? Fewer Traffic Deaths

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As unwelcome as they are, higher gasoline prices do come with a plus side – fewer deaths from car accidents, says a researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

An analysis of yearly vehicle deaths compared to gas prices found death rates drop significantly as people slow down and drive less. If gas remains at \$4 a gallon or higher for a year or more, traffic deaths could drop by more than 1,000 per month nationwide, said Michael Morrissey, Ph.D., director of UAB's Lister Hill Center for Health Policy and a co-author on the new findings.

“It is remarkable to think that a percent change in gas prices can equal lives saved, which is what our data show,” Morrissey said. “For every 10 percent rise in gas prices, fatalities are reduced by 2.3 percent. The effects are even more dramatic for teen drivers.”

The early results were presented in June at a health economist meeting in North Carolina. A coauthor on report is David Grabowski, Ph.D., of Harvard Medical School.

The research included death rates and gas-price changes from 1985 through 2006, and the calculated percent reduction in fatalities can be extrapolated to 2008 and beyond, Morrissey said.

The results come after earlier research by the coauthors found lower gas prices have the opposite effect by wiping away many of lifesaving

outcomes from the enactment of mandatory seatbelt laws, lower blood alcohol limits and graduated drivers licenses for youth.

The UAB-Harvard findings did show the more restrictive graduated license programs helped reduce traffic deaths by 24 percent among drivers aged 15 to 17.

Source: University of Alabama at Birmingham

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