

Survey finds drivers mistakenly believe winter is most dangerous travel time

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Most Americans interviewed in a national poll believe winter is the most dangerous time for driving, but the truth is that summer is the most dangerous time with Fourth of July weekend being the deadliest.

In survey findings released today, researchers at the University of Minnesota's Center for Excellence in Rural Safety (CERS) found that an overwhelming 83 percent of Americans consider winter to be "the most dangerous season to be driving on rural roadways." Summer is actually the most dangerous time, but only eight percent believe that. Four percent found spring the most dangerous time, and four percent see fall as the most dangerous time.

The Fourth of July is often the most dangerous driving day of the year, according to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#). Crowded rural roads and holiday-related drinking are among the many factors that contribute to the danger.

"Americans' sense of seasonal driving risk is skewed," said Tom Horan of CERS, which conducted the survey. "We are wary of winter driving, but let our guard down during summer holidays, when fatalities are most likely to occur."

Rural roads are particularly perilous. While U.S. Census figures show that about one out of five (21 percent) Americans live in rural areas, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has found that about six out of 10 (57 percent) percent of highway deaths occur on roads that it

considers rural.

Lighter traffic and pleasant scenery on rural roads can lull drivers into a false sense of security. This can lead to motorists driving at unsafe speeds, as well as being distracted, fatigued, unbelted or impaired while driving, all of which increase the likelihood of a crash. Additionally, [emergency response](#) time to a rural crash and hospital transport times can be lengthy and thus jeopardize survival rate. Crash victims are five to seven times more likely to die from their injuries unless they arrive at a trauma center in the first half-hour following the crash.

Today, CERS also released the Top 100 Summer Rural Hot Spots, or the rural areas that have experienced the most fatalities over the past eight years during the summer months. While 32 states have [rural areas](#) in the Top 100, the states with the most "hot spots" are Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (in alphabetical order). Because of ties, there are 115 hot spots on the Top 100 list. A searchable map showing all of the hot spots is available at www.saferoadmaps.org.

The hot spots are presented in a visually arresting Google Map-based format, where viewers can zoom from a national map showing all 100 spots, all the way down to a photo of each individual section of the road.

To help drivers plan safe trips, CERS created SafeRoadMaps, a Google Maps-based system which allows anyone visiting www.saferoadmaps.org to enter a zip code, municipality name or street address and immediately see a map or satellite image of all of the road fatalities that have occurred in the chosen area over the past eight years. Details about each individual crash are also available, such as whether the driver was wearing a seatbelt, drinking, or speeding. The tool also notes which life-saving public policies, such as strong seat belt laws, are being employed in the chosen area.

"As drivers get ready for the holiday weekend, they can use this tool to learn about the deadliest spots on their routes," Horan says. "That awareness helps drivers focus on staying safe. It also helps local leaders see which [rural roads](#) in their areas are dangerous."

Provided by University of Minnesota

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