Pedestrian Fatalities on the Rise

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After decades of decline, pedestrian deaths in the United States are on the rise.

U.S. pedestrian fatalities soared 53 percent from 4,109 to 6,283 between the years 2009 and 2018, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety’s recent analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data. The greatest increase occurred in urban areas, and “on arterials, at non-intersection locations, and in darkness.”

Data for the state of Illinois matches this trend: from 2019 to 2020, Illinois pedestrian fatalities rose 7 percent, according to data from the Governors Highway Safety Association. Meanwhile, the Illinois Department of Transportation’s Fatal Crash Data for 2021 so far shows 56 pedestrian deaths statewide.

None of these sources explicitly cite one single cause for this increase in pedestrian deaths. At least in Illinois, the number of motorists speeding or driving recklessly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic because the roads were less congested. Speeding was also an acknowledged factor in the AAA’s analysis, along
with large vehicles and poor lighting. For example, the analysis notes that a large number of pedestrian deaths “occurred in darkness,” suggesting a lack of lighting played a part in the person being hit.

The number of deaths increased particularly for pedestrians in their 50s, 60s and 70s, accounting for more than half of the entire national increase, while the number of children and teens killed as pedestrians was lower in 2018 than in 2009.

Even when pedestrian accidents are not fatal, they can leave the victim with damages, such as medical expenses for injuries, lost wages, pain and suffering, and even permanent disabilities.

The AAA’s analysis notes that more research is needed to identify both the reasons pedestrian deaths are on the rise as well as countermeasures that can be put in place to reduce the number of crashes and deaths.

In the meantime, it is extremely important to practice caution and vigilance any time you are a pedestrian. Be aware of your surroundings at all times and make yourself visible at all times. Drivers should yield to pedestrians at all times and make it a point to avoid distractions when behind the wheel.

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