U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

NHTSA
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TRAFFIC SAFETY FACTS
2012 Data

DOT HS 812 050

July 2014

Rural/Urban Comparison

Overview

This fact sheet contains statistics on motor vehicle fatal crashes based on data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). FARS is a census of fatal crashes within the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (although Puerto Rico is not included in the national totals). Rural and urban boundaries are determined by the State highway departments and approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

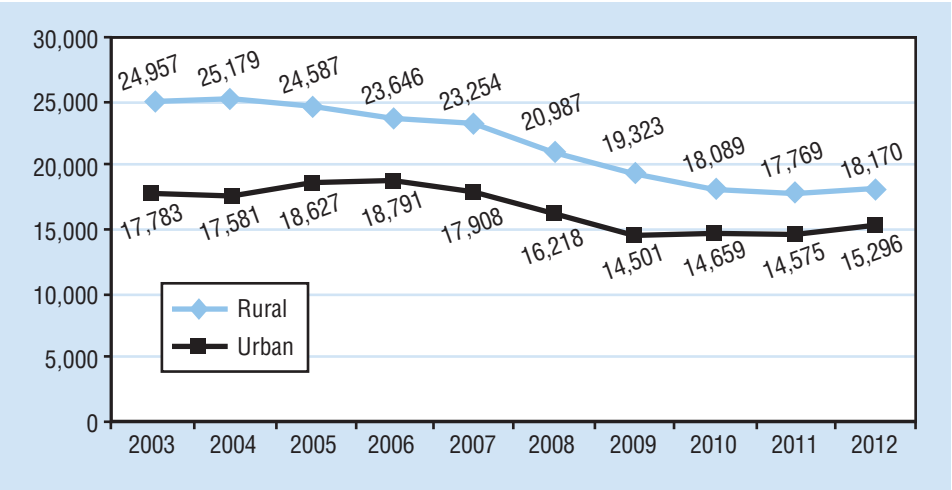
In 2012, there were 30,800 fatal crashes resulting in 33,561 fatalities. Rural areas accounted for 53 percent (16,443) of the fatal crashes and 54 percent (18,170) of the fatalities as compared to urban areas that accounted for 46 percent (14,263) of the fatal crashes and 46 percent (15,296) of the fatalities. Additionally, 94 fatal crashes resulting in 95 fatalities occurred in areas where land use was unknown. According to the 2010 rural and urban population data from the Census Bureau, 19 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, however, rural fatalities accounted for 54 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2012.

Although 19 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, rural fatalities accounted for 54 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2012. From 2003 to 2012, rural fatalities decreased 27 percent, whereas urban fatalities decreased by 14 percent.

Trends

From 2003 to 2012, rural fatalities decreased 27 percent from 24,957 in 2003 to 18,170 in 2012 whereas urban fatalities decreased by 14 percent from 17,783 in 2003 to 15,296 in 2012 (Figure 1). The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in rural areas declined by 19 percent from 2.30 in 2003 to 1.86 in 2012. During the same time period the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in urban areas declined by 21 percent from 0.98 in 2003 to 0.77 in 2012 (Figure 2).

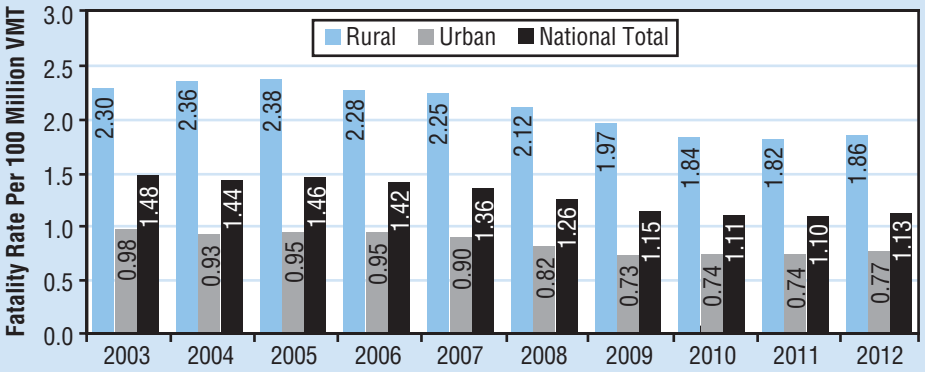
Figure 1
Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities, by Year and Location, 2003–2012



In 2012, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled was 2.4 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas (1.86 and 0.77, respectively).

Figure 2

Fatalities per 100 Million Vehicle Miles Traveled, by Year and Location, 2003–2012



Source: Vehicle Miles Traveled – Federal Highway Administration

In 2012, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled was 2.4 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas (1.86 and 0.77, respectively).

Speeding

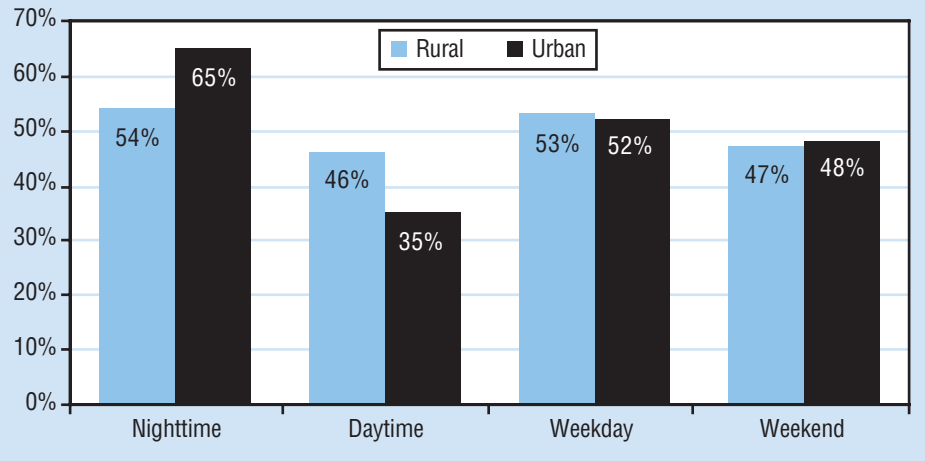
According to 2012 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data, people killed in speeding-related crashes represented 30 percent (10,219) of the fatalities in motor vehicle traffic crashes. NHTSA considers a crash to be speeding-related if the driver was charged with a speeding-related offense or if an officer indicated that racing, driving too fast for conditions, or exceeding the posted speed limit was a contributing factor in the crash.

In rural areas, 31 percent (5,660) of the fatalities occurred in speeding-related crashes as compared to 30 percent (4,527) in urban areas.

Data also showed that in 2012, over half (54%) of rural area speeding-related fatalities occurred at night (6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m.) and 47 percent occurred over the weekend, whereas in urban areas, nearly two-thirds (65%) of speeding-related fatalities occurred at night and 48 percent took place over the weekend (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Percentages of Speeding-Related Fatalities in Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes, By Time of Day, Day of the Week, and Location, 2012



In 2012, 66 percent of all drivers involved in urban fatal crashes were on roadways where the posted speed limit was 50 mph or less. In rural fatal crashes, 67 percent of drivers involved were on roadways where the posted speed limit was 55 mph or higher.

Time of Day

In rural areas, 52 percent of the fatal crashes occurred during the day, while 47 percent occurred at night. In urban areas, 56 percent of the fatal crashes occurred at night (6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m.) and 44 percent occurred during the day (6 a.m. to 5:59 p.m.).

Alcohol

In 2012, there were 10,322 people killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes. Rural areas accounted for 55 percent (5,724) of these fatalities as compared to 44 percent (4,573) in urban areas. Data has also shown that over the 10 years from 2003 to 2012, alcohol-impaired-driving fatalities decreased by 21 percent nationwide. In rural areas alcohol-impaired-driving fatalities decreased by 25 percent while urban areas showed a 16-percent decrease.

From 2003 to 2012, alcohol-impaired-driving fatalities in rural areas decreased by 25 percent, while urban areas showed a 16-percent decrease.

Table 1

Fatalities in Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes, by Location and the Highest Driver* BAC in the Crash, 2003 and 2012

Location	2003			2012		
	Total Fatalities	Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities BAC=.08+		Total Fatalities	Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities BAC=.08+	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Rural	24,957	7,648	31	18,170	5,724	31
Urban	17,783	5,413	30	15,296	4,573	30
Total**	**42,884**	**13,096**	**31**	**33,561**	**10,322**	**31**

* Includes motorcycle riders.
** Includes fatalities where location was unknown.

In 2012, there were 45,337 drivers involved in fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes. Of those drivers, 21 percent (9,678) were found to be driving with blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) of .08 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher. Drivers in rural areas accounted for 55 percent of the alcohol-impaired drivers versus 45 percent in urban areas.

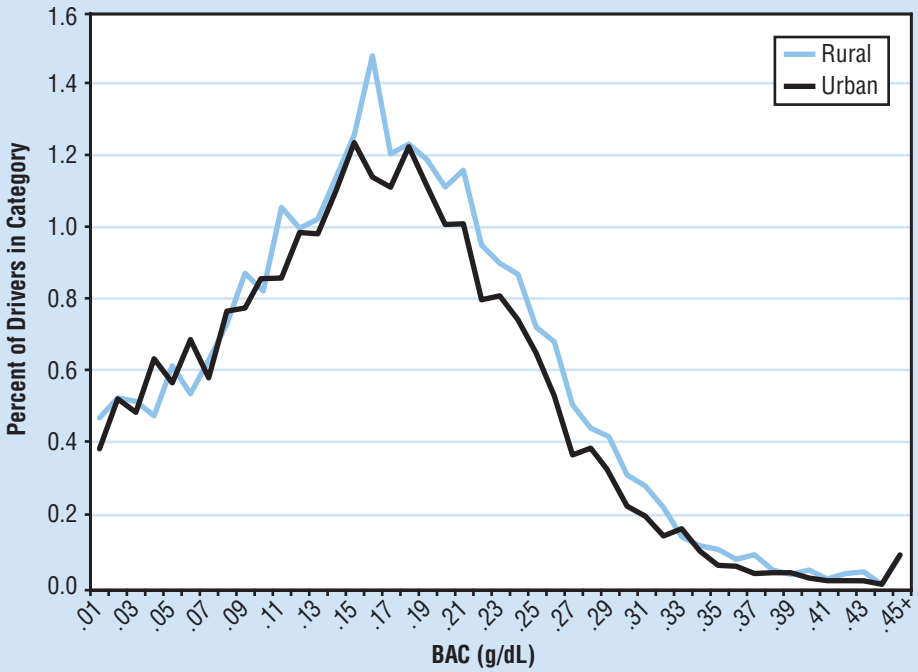
In fatal crashes, the highest percentages of drivers with BACs of .08 g/dL or higher were recorded for drivers 21 to 24 years old (32%), followed by age groups 25 to 34 (29%) and 35 to 44 (25%). Rural and urban drivers followed this trend with 21- to 24-year-olds (33% and 32%) having the highest percentage followed by 25- to 34-year-olds (31% and 26%) and 35- to 44-year-olds (26% and 23%).

In cases where drivers had one or more previous DWI convictions, data shows that in rural areas 56 percent of drivers involved in fatal crashes were alcohol-impaired as compared to 50 percent in urban areas.

The most frequently recorded BAC among drinking drivers involved in fatal crashes in rural areas was .16 g/dL, and in urban areas was .15 g/dL (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Distribution of Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Location, 2012



In 2012, the seat belt use rate among occupants of vehicles in urban areas was 86 percent and rural occupants were observed to have a use rate of 84 percent (2012 NOPUS).

Restraint Use

The 2012 National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) shows that the seat belt use rate among occupants of vehicles in urban areas was 86 percent, and rural occupants were observed to have a use rate of 84 percent (see NHTSA Research Note Seat Belt Use in 2012—Overall Results (NOPUS), DOT HS 811 691).

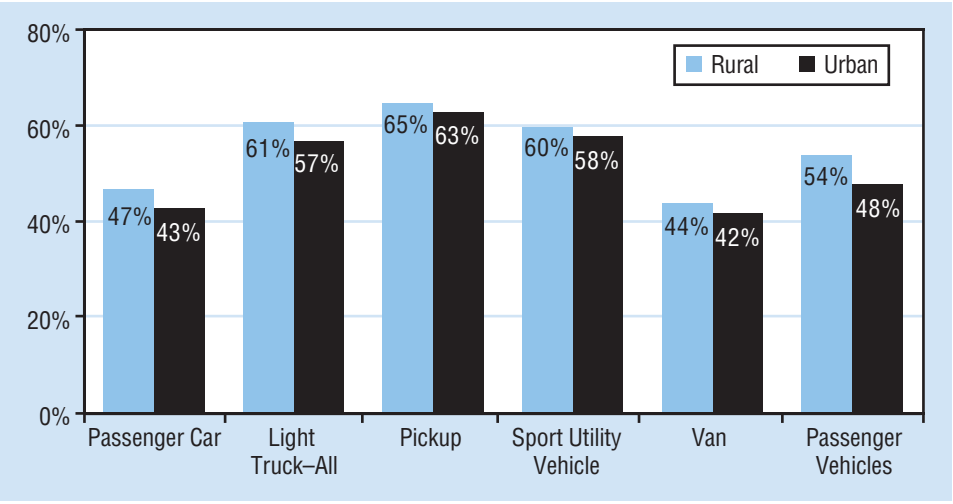
In fatal crashes in 2012, there were 21,667 passenger vehicle occupants killed. Rural areas accounted for 61 percent of these deaths. Fifty-four percent of rural passenger vehicle occupants killed were unrestrained as compared to 48 percent of urban passenger vehicle occupants killed. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of rural pickup truck occupants killed were unrestrained – the highest percentage of any passenger vehicle occupants killed among both rural and urban areas (Figure 5).

Of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in rural areas, 40 percent were in vehicles that rolled over versus 26 percent in urban areas. Data further shows that 68 percent of rural and 67 percent of urban passenger vehicle occupants killed were unrestrained in rollover vehicles (based on known restraint use).

In 2012, sport utility vehicles (SUVs) involved in rural fatal crashes experienced the highest rollover percentage at 40 percent. Other vehicle rollover percentages included: 34 percent for pickups, 22 percent for passenger cars, 21 percent for vans, and 18 percent for large trucks. In urban areas, vehicles experienced a much lower percentage that included: 21 percent for SUVs, 15 percent for pickups, 9 percent for passenger cars and large trucks, and 8 percent for vans.

Figure 5

Percentages of Unrestrained Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities, by Vehicle Type and Location, 2012



Restraint use percentages based on known use.

In 2012, 54 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in rural areas were unrestrained compared to 48 percent of urban passenger vehicle occupants killed.

In 2012, rural drivers involved in fatal crashes were found to have a slightly higher percentage of drivers with valid driver's licenses than urban drivers, (87% versus 85%, respectively).

In 2012, there were 21,394 drivers killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes. Sixty-five percent of the rural drivers died at the scene of the crash, compared to 48 percent of urban drivers. Data also shows that 41 percent of all drivers killed were transported to hospitals and 3 percent of these drivers died en route. Rural drivers represented 68 percent of drivers who died en route to hospitals compared to only 32 percent for urban drivers.

For more information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA), NVS-424, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted on 800-934-8517 or via the following e-mail address: ncsaweb@dot.gov. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at www.nhtsa.gov/ncsa. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Alcohol-Impaired Driving, Bicyclists and Other Cyclists, Children, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, Older Population, Occupant Protection, Overview, Passenger Vehicles, Pedestrians, Race and Ethnicity, School Transportation-Related Crashes, Speeding, State Alcohol Estimates, State Traffic Data,* and *Young Drivers.* Detailed data on motor vehicle traffic crashes are published annually in *Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System.* The fact sheets and annual Traffic Safety Facts report can be accessed online at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/CATS/index.aspx.

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Table 2

Fatalities in Motor Vehicle Crashes by State and Location, 2012

State	Location						Total	
	Rural		Urban		Unknown			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Alabama	506	58	346	40	13	2	865	100
Alaska	39	66	20	34	0	0	59	100
Arizona	375	45	448	54	2	0	825	100
Arkansas	431	78	121	22	0	0	552	100
California	1,181	41	1,676	59	0	0	2,857	100
Colorado	231	49	241	51	0	0	472	100
Connecticut	77	33	156	66	3	1	236	100
Delaware	57	50	57	50	0	0	114	100
Dist of Columbia	0	0	15	100	0	0	15	100
Florida	870	36	1,551	64	3	0	2,424	100
Georgia	589	49	603	51	0	0	1,192	100
Hawaii	57	45	69	55	0	0	126	100
Idaho	152	83	32	17	0	0	184	100
Illinois	395	41	561	59	0	0	956	100
Indiana	522	67	257	33	0	0	779	100
Iowa	286	78	79	22	0	0	365	100
Kansas	326	80	79	20	0	0	405	100
Kentucky	582	78	164	22	0	0	746	100
Louisiana	345	48	377	52	0	0	722	100
Maine	164	100	0	0	0	0	164	100
Maryland	180	36	319	63	6	1	505	100
Massachusetts	49	14	300	86	0	0	349	100
Michigan	424	45	509	54	5	1	938	100
Minnesota	269	68	126	32	0	0	395	100
Mississippi	407	70	175	30	0	0	582	100
Missouri	474	57	350	42	2	0	826	100
Montana	191	93	14	7	0	0	205	100
Nebraska	161	76	51	24	0	0	212	100
Nevada	77	30	180	70	1	0	258	100
New Hampshire	60	56	48	44	0	0	108	100
New Jersey	71	12	516	88	2	0	589	100
New Mexico	259	71	105	29	1	0	365	100
New York	614	53	554	47	0	0	1,168	100
North Carolina	901	70	391	30	0	0	1,292	100
North Dakota	146	86	24	14	0	0	170	100
Ohio	633	56	460	41	30	3	1,123	100
Oklahoma	467	66	241	34	0	0	708	100
Oregon	229	68	107	32	0	0	336	100
Pennsylvania	697	53	613	47	0	0	1,310	100
Rhode Island	10	16	54	84	0	0	64	100
South Carolina	751	87	112	13	0	0	863	100
South Dakota	117	88	16	12	0	0	133	100
Tennessee	577	57	437	43	0	0	1,014	100
Texas	1,694	50	1,703	50	1	0	3,398	100
Utah	95	44	122	56	0	0	217	100
Vermont	63	82	14	18	0	0	77	100
Virginia	345	44	406	52	26	3	777	100
Washington	273	61	171	39	0	0	444	100
West Virginia	261	77	78	23	0	0	339	100
Wisconsin	389	63	226	37	0	0	615	100
Wyoming	101	82	22	18	0	0	123	100
National	**18,170**	**54**	**15,296**	**46**	**95**	**0**	**33,561**	**100**
Puerto Rico	200	58	147	42	0	0	347	100