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# Local News

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## Traffic-fatality report tough on Hawai'i teens

By Mike Leidemann  
Advertiser Staff Writer

When it comes to teenage drivers involved in fatal accidents, Hawai'i is among the worst states in the country, according to a report released yesterday.

More than 23 percent of the state's traffic fatalities in 2004 occurred in accidents where at least one driver was aged 16 to 20, ranking the state 10th worst in the nation, according to the study done by the National Safety Council and the safety advocacy group End Needless Death on Our Roadways.

When comparing 1994 to 2004, Hawai'i had one of the largest increases in fatal accidents involving teen drivers in the nation: 73.7 percent. Only Rhode Island (122 percent) and New Hampshire (200 percent) had a bigger increase.

However, state officials said yesterday that the study provides just a snapshot of what happened in two separate years of Hawai'i accidents and does not adequately reflect statistical ups and

### BY THE NUMBERS

142

Hawai'i traffic fatalities in 2004

33

Hawai'i traffic fatalities involving at least one driver aged 16 to 20 in 2004

23.4%

Percent of 2004 fatal accidents that involved those young drivers

122

Hawai'i traffic fatalities in 1994

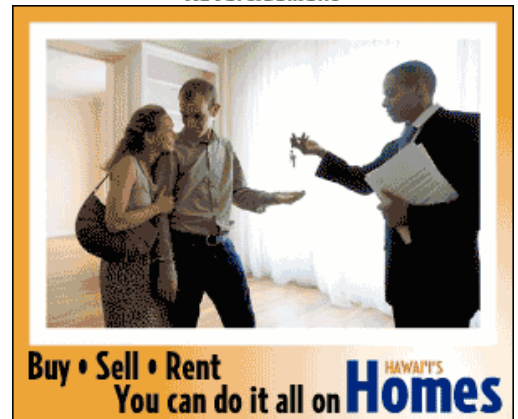
19

Hawai'i traffic fatalities involving at least one driver aged 16 to 20 in 1994

15.7%

Percent of 1994 fatal accidents that involved those young drivers

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downs or steps the state has taken in recent years to address teenage driving problems.

"For instance, if the study had looked at the year 2005 instead of 2004, the number of fatal accidents involving teenage drivers would have dropped to 14.2 percent," said state Transportation Director Rod Haraga. That would have made Hawai'i among the safest places nationwide for teen driving, according to study data.

The percentage of fatal accidents involving teen drivers has fluctuated in Hawai'i since the early 1990s and doesn't provide a good picture of the situation because the total number of fatalities is very small compared with most states, Haraga said. Still, the state's estimated 30,400 teenage drivers, who make up just 3.4 percent of Hawai'i's licensed drivers, account for a disproportional number of accidents, he said.

Nationally, teen drivers make up about 6 percent of the driving population and are involved in 20 percent of all fatal motor vehicle deaths.

"We're especially focused on promoting safe driving among Hawai'i's teens," Haraga said. "We've been very aggressive in that area and think it will have a big effect."

In January, the state became one of the last nationwide to institute a new graduated licensing program that is designed to give teen drivers a chance to safely develop their auto skills over several months before they become fully licensed. It requires teens ages 16 to 18 to obtain a "provisional" license for at least six months before they can receive a regular driver's license. The provisional license restricts a youth's ability to drive late at night or with other teens in the car.

"We are also partnering with law enforcement and community organizations to reduce the prevalence of underage drinking, which contributes to the number of accidents involving our youth," Haraga said.

Earlier this month, Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona signed into law three bills to reduce drunken driving and underage drinking. They increase penalties for those who operate a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol level of .15 or higher, strengthen underage drinking enforcement, and suspend the driving privileges of any person under age 21 who purchases, possesses or consumes alcohol.

Still, all states could be doing more to address the problem, national officials said.

"We're not looking to pick on states for poor performance. This report shows that the number of people dying in crashes involving young drivers has not been significantly reduced over the last 10 years," said John Ulcycki, director of the National Safety Council's transportation safety group. "Our goal is to find out what works and what doesn't so that we

BEST AND WORST	
Highest percentages of traffic fatalities involving at least one driver age 16-20 in 2004	
District of Columbia	30.2%
Delaware	26.2%
Maine	25.8%
Colorado	24.8%
New Hampshire	24.6%
Minnesota	24.5%
Nebraska	24.4%
Rhode Island	24.1%
Oklahoma	23.9%
<b>Hawai'i</b>	<b>23.2%</b>
Lowest percentages of traffic fatalities involving at least one 16-20 year-old driver, 2004	
North Dakota	11.0%
New Jersey	14.9%
Nevada	14.9%
South Dakota	15.7%
West Virginia	15.8%
Alaska	15.8%
South Carolina	15.9%
Montana	16.6%
New Mexico	16.7%
Maryland	16.8%
Source: National Safety Council	

can do much better."

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