

Zero Traffic Deaths in Five Easy Steps

03/29/11 300 W - + 12 - 7

That's the headline from today's [News & Observer story](#) about a Greenville emergency room doctor who has co-authored an article for the [North Carolina Medical Journal](#), with a five-point prescription for eliminating traffic deaths in North Carolina. He recommends:

- Raise the minimum driving age to 17.
- Create special courts for DWI cases.
- Outlaw phone use while driving.
- Build more bike lanes and sidewalks.
- Make roundabouts standard at intersections, and rumble strips standard on shoulders and center lanes.

Sounds reasonable as described in the news story, though the legislators are probably unwilling to pass such phone laws, since it would apply to them as well. Cynical editorial opinion there. Ditto perhaps for anything that makes a bigger dent in drinking and driving prosecution. Alcohol consumption is a pretty popular on this planet.

The three-page journal article is available online, as part of the full issue that you can download from the [NCMJ web site](#). The file is 16 megs in size. Be aware.

Wonder what a cost analysis would look like? Compare the operational and capital costs for the above steps against the costs for emergency services and medical treatment. Would the numbers pay off? Obviously, from a moral and ethical perspective, reduction of deaths is an entirely good thing!

Secondly, what would happen if the responder community put its weight behind such ideas? Didn't we read something from overseas, about fire departments re-purposing their missions to include injury reductions?

Or maybe that was a suggestion by one of the national fire bloggers, that fire departments could embrace initiatives to, say, reduce motor-vehicle deaths. You know, the way they've championed and effected change in fire deaths. You've got your "fire prevention" bureaus. How about "injury and death prevention" bureaus? What say you?

It may sound reasonable, but it's just like saying that gun violence will stop if we enact more strict gun laws. There will ALWAYS be distracted drivers, there will always be drunk drivers, there will always be people over 17 that just flat can't drive, etc. There will never be an end to MVC deaths unless we don't have any more MVs. I mean, did they make different laws in horse-and-buggy days to keep people from dying? "Hold on, Clem, you can't go out in the surry because you've had too many."

That doctor has good ideas, but they will never work, even if put into practice.

Duda ([Email](#)) - 03/29/11 - 15:05

If you take that mind-set, why do we bother with fire prevention and fire codes? Wouldn't there always be fires regardless??

Even though "injury and death prevention" efforts wouldn't eliminate those occurances completely, I would argue that such an effort would be worthwhile, even it if saved on a limited number of lives. Especially if one those ended up being a loved one.

Devil's Advocate - 03/29/11 - 15:12

It seems the doctor made a trip to Europe. The ideas are good, but won't achieve zero deaths. They would only help to reduce traffic deaths. E.g. Germany: driving age is 18 (in some states 17), phone use while driving is forbidden, lots of bike lanes and sidewalks beside every street, roundabouts are becoming standard, trucks are not allowed to drive as fast as cars – traffic deaths: around 4000 per year. So politicians discuss speed limits on the autobahn, also for ecological reasons.

As Duda says, there will be MVC deaths as long as there are MVs. But reducing deaths is a nice vision and with the points above the safety raises for everyone on the streets.

Dennis ([Email](#)) - 03/30/11 - 02:28

I like the idea of trucks being restricted to 10mph less than cars on highways with speed limits over 60mph. I think they do that in other states now. And yes, I'm all for saving lives, even if it's just one. But our legislatures have much more fluff on their plates than to worry about taxpayers/voters dying on the highways. We all know laws are meant only for the law-abiding, so regardless of legislation, there will also always be the unlawful. It's the same thing with gun laws. Some people think that tougher gun laws will prevent gun violence and death. But they only serve to keep those who abide by the laws in check. Criminals do what they want, regardless. Maybe one life will be saved by these measures, but the realist in me says there's always collateral damage in war, and sometimes it's someone close to us who is lost. Laws don't stop the inevitable; they only prolong or postpone it.

Duda ([Email](#)) - 03/30/11 - 09:47

here of late I would wager to say it's the older drivers who are the issue... there needs to be tougher restrictions to renew your license after a certain age when the reflexes slow. Most youth related accidents I would wager to say are single vehicle, and due to excessive speed. While with the elderly it is the contrary...

but you can outlaw doing everything but having two hands on the wheel while driving, take the stereos out, cell phones out, etc, but the bottom line is there will still be accidents, mechanical failures and just plain ole stupidity. But sure let's have more unfunded mandates brought about.

shevais - 03/30/11 - 10:32

Thanks for bolstering my point, Shev. I can't tell you how many driver re-eval forms I did when I was a police officer in the late 90s. It cost a few people their licenses, but I think it was for the better.

Duda ([Email](#)) - 04/01/11 - 14:41

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