



MaineDOT Flash Facts

## **Topic: Driving too fast for conditions**

### **General Facts:**

Illegal or Unsafe Speed is a factor in 15% of all Maine crashes, but a factor in nearly 40% of fatal crashes.

30% of the excessive speed related fatal crashes occur between 10 pm and 3am – times when traffic volumes are very low. Don't let the feeling that you have the road to yourself lead to reckless behavior.

Excessive speed leads to the following problems:

- Reduced time to react to hazards on the road
- Increased distance to bring your car to a stop
- Reduced ability to control vehicle/or to correct maneuvering

Any of these problems can be the difference between being safe or having a crash with severe impact.

### **More than 40% of winter storm crashes are due to illegal or unsafe speed.**

224 people died in crashes resulting from driving too fast for conditions between 2002 and 2004. Nearly 90% of these fatalities occurred when the vehicle left the lane--- either in a Run Off the Road or Head On collision.

Illegal or unsafe speed is a particular concern for young drivers. Some 2004 Maine statistics:

- Over 50% of 16 to 21 year old drivers involved in fatal crashes were reported as driving too fast.
- One third of all fatal crashes involving speed involved drivers aged 16 to 21.
- Nearly 2,300 drivers aged 16 to 21 were noted in their crash reports as traveling at illegal or unsafe speed.

This information is provided by MaineDOT, for further safety information contact 207-624-3278



Do a quick mental test when you are driving and ask yourself “If something suddenly occurs, will be able to *react and stop* in time to avoid hitting... (another vehicle, a pedestrian, a moose?)” If the answer is “no”, slow down!

Run-Off Road crashes result in the most fatalities of all crash types in Maine. One half of Run Off Road crashes involve excessive or illegal speed.

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The posted speed limit is one important factor for determining safe speed, but there are other considerations. Some situations where slower speed may be necessary are:

- Weather (this time of year brings the toughest challenges: ice and snow-and not just during a storm. As temperatures fluctuate, ice and snow melt refreeze, especially at night, so road surfaces that were okay earlier can become slick. Watch for black ice, and remember that bridges usually freeze first. So SLOW DOWN – it does not take much snow, slush or ice to significantly reduce traction.)
- Road features, such as curves and hills (especially at crests)
- Visibility - Bright sun; nighttime conditions; and heavy, blowing snow all reduce your ability to see and be seen.

Adjust your speed so you can:

- Read the road ahead.
- React to changing conditions (such as curves, pedestrians, entering traffic, animals, etc.).
- Brake or maneuver for unexpected changes while maintaining vehicle control.
- Adapt to unfamiliar roads.

Remember these items when considering speed:

- What's the condition of the road surface?
- Can I react to unexpected objects in the road?
- What's the condition of my vehicle? (tires, brakes, wipers, etc)
- What's the weather and visibility?
- Are roads that were wet earlier now frozen?
- Do roads look shiny or wet? (indicating that they might be slippery)



If the weather's bad:

- Have you decreased speed?
  - Increased the distance between you and the vehicle ahead? (at least 4 seconds)
  - What kind of condition am I, the driver, in? (Tired, sleepy, angry?)
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Keep your vehicle at a speed that you can control it and safely use your brakes.  
Factors to consider in adjusting your speed:

Weather conditions (snow, sleet, freezing rain, rain, fog)

- Affect visibility and traction.
- Can lead to hydroplaning, especially on rutted roads
- Can reduce ability to brake and turn
- Significantly limit visibility during white-outs

Road conditions (Snow, ice or slush) Hills and Curves

Sight Distance - Maintain a speed at which you can stop within the distance you can see ahead. Pull completely off the road if conditions are severe.

Night time-harder to see road features and movements of pedestrians and animals, especially to the side of the road, so slow down

Vehicle Conditions

- Tires must have good tread
- Brakes must be in good working order
- Four-wheel drive does not help in braking and gives a false sense of security

Driver Conditions

- Am I sleepy or tired?
  - Am I upset or angry?
  - Is there anything else going on with me that will effect how I drive?
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In addition to weather and road conditions, here are some other situations where speed should be reduced:

- When following a snow plow traveling in the same direction; or approaching one coming in the opposite direction.

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- Residential and commercial areas. (Where traffic will be exiting and turning into driveways and intersections. This time of year can be especially difficult because of snow banks blocking your ability to see traffic. You may also need to quickly react to plows and people shoveling out their driveways.)
- Nighttime (When wildlife is especially difficult to see. Moose and deer collisions are common everywhere in the state.)

Maintaining a safe speed allows you to drive defensively and watch out for problems with “the other vehicle”. Avoid having their mistake become your problem.

Make sure you travel at speeds that allow adequate reaction time and safe braking and turning in the event you need to avoid a collision.

***Be a Road Model*** ...“We all need to slow down!”