

# Center for Excellence in Rural Safety



## CERS Survey on Driver Risk-Taking and Policy Support

[www.ruralsafety.umn.edu](http://www.ruralsafety.umn.edu)

The Center for Excellence in Rural Safety (CERS) at the University of Minnesota conducted a national survey in March through May of 2010 related to road safety public policies and driver risk assessments.

### Policy Findings

CERS has concluded that research supports six public policies as effective in reducing rural road fatalities. Adoption of many of these policies has been limited, in part by a perception that they lack strong public support. The findings of this survey call that assumption into question.

	Effectiveness “...please tell me how effective you believe that idea would be as a way to improve road safety.”	Support “...please tell me whether you oppose or support that idea.”
<b>Primary Seat Belt Laws</b> “Allowing law enforcement officials to stop and ticket drivers for failure to obey seatbelt laws.”	<b>73% effective</b> (39% “very effective,” 34% “somewhat effective”) <b>27% ineffective</b> (12% “very ineffective,” 15% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>72% support</b> (42% “very supportive,” 31% “somewhat supportive”) <b>28% oppose</b> (13% “very opposed,” 14% “somewhat opposed”)
<b>Sobriety Checkpoints</b> “Allowing law enforcement officials to stop drivers at checkpoints and ticket those driving drunk.”	<b>90% effective</b> (63% “very effective,” 27% “somewhat effective”) <b>9% ineffective</b> (5% “very ineffective,” 4% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>82% support</b> (58% “very supportive,” 25% “somewhat supportive”) <b>18% oppose</b> (8% “very opposed,” 9% “somewhat opposed”)
<b>Motorcycle Helmet Mandate</b> “Requiring motorcyclists to wear a helmet.”	<b>86% effective</b> (70% “very effective,” 16% “somewhat effective”) <b>13% ineffective</b> (6% “very ineffective,” 7% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>84% support</b> (67% “very supportive,” 18% “somewhat supportive”) <b>15% oppose</b> (7% “very opposed,” 8% “somewhat opposed”)
<b>Graduated Driver’s Licenses</b> “Requiring new drivers to gain experience and skills gradually over time in low-risk environments before giving them a full driver’s license.”	<b>89% effective</b> (60% “very effective,” 29% “somewhat effective”) <b>10% ineffective</b> (4% “very ineffective,” 6% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>88% support</b> (61% “very supportive,” 27% “somewhat supportive”) <b>11% oppose</b> (3% “very opposed,” 8% “somewhat opposed”)
<b>Automated Speed Enforcement</b> “Enforcing speed limits through the use of automated camera and radar devices.”	<b>73% effective</b> (34% “very effective,” 38% “somewhat effective”) <b>27% ineffective</b> (14% “very ineffective,” 12% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>64% support</b> (29% “very supportive,” 35% “somewhat supportive”) <b>35% oppose</b> (19% “very opposed,” 16% “somewhat opposed”)
<b>Breathalyzer-Based Ignition Locks</b> “Requiring people convicted of drunk driving to install a device on their car that locks the ignition if the driver fails an automated in-vehicle breathalyzer test.”	<b>89% effective</b> (69% “very effective,” 20% “somewhat effective”) <b>10% ineffective</b> (5% “very ineffective,” 5% “somewhat ineffective”)	<b>88% support</b> (68% “very supportive,” 20% “somewhat supportive”) <b>11% oppose</b> (5% “very opposed,” 6% “somewhat opposed”)

“How important is it to you that your local lawmakers are working to improve the safety of roads in your area?”

<b>Net “Not Important”</b>	<b>9%</b> (3% “Not at all important,” 6% “not very important”)
<b>Net “Important”</b>	<b>91%</b> (65% “Very important,” 26% “somewhat important”)

### *Driver Risk Assessment Findings*

**Seasonal Risk.** An overwhelming 83 percent of Americans incorrectly consider winter to be “the most dangerous season to be driving on rural roadways.” Only 8 percent believe summer is the most dangerous time. Four percent found spring the most dangerous time, and four percent see fall as the most dangerous time.

**Rural Risk.** Many don’t understand the greater risk they face on rural highways. For instance, 69 percent of Americans responded that they felt safe on multilane freeways in urban areas, while 79 percent felt safe on two-lane highways in rural areas. Thirty-eight percent responded that they feel relaxed on rural highways and just 19 percent feel relaxed on urban freeways. Among rural residents, 69 percent felt relaxed on rural highways, versus just 13 percent who felt relaxed on urban freeways.

This feeling of relaxation and safety seems to lead to a bit more risk taking on the more dangerous rural highways. For instance, Americans are more likely to feel safe eating, using a cell phone, and drinking and driving on rural highways than they are on urban freeways. This is particularly true of rural residents. For instance, among rural residents, 44 percent said they feel safe using a cell phone on a rural highway versus 14 percent who feel safe using a cell phone on an urban freeway.

The exception to this trend of Americans feeling more comfortable engaging in risky driving behaviors on rural highways is speeding. About half of Americans feel safe speeding on urban freeways (47 percent), while a third feel safe speeding on rural highways.

In an open-ended question, survey respondents who felt safer on rural highways than urban freeways were asked why they

felt this way. The most common answer (51 percent) was that there were just fewer things on the road to worry about—less traffic, less congestion, and fewer people. The second most common answer (31 percent) was that the driver knew the area and felt comfortable in the area.



Photo courtesy of Minnesota Department of Public Safety

### **About the Survey**

The survey was sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety (CERS) at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and conducted by Critical Insights of Portland, Maine. The findings represent the responses of a randomized national probability sample of 1,205 registered voters who drive at least once per week. The survey was conducted from March 23, 2010, to May 6, 2010. The margin of error for questions in which the entire sample is considered is +/- 2.8 percent. Responses for gender, age, and state/region were weighted where necessary to bring these data into alignment with actual proportions within the U.S. population. The margin of error for questions in which the entire sample is considered is +/- 2.8 percent. The margin of error is higher when smaller sub-populations are analyzed. The survey has been featured in *USA Today* and other national news outlets.

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