

## **This is Your Brain on ... the Road? | Portland Injury Attorneys**

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The message is hard-hitting and constant: Don't do drugs. American culture has become saturated with ominous warnings about the perils of narcotics. "Just say no." "Talk to your kids about drugs." "Meth is death."

Who would guess that, according to [a recent report from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](#), accidents claim more lives than the needle?

The April 17, 2009, CDC report examined statistics on death rates throughout the nation. The data include both unadjusted and age-adjusted numbers for the 15 leading causes of death, which, together, accounted for 81.5% of all deaths nationally.

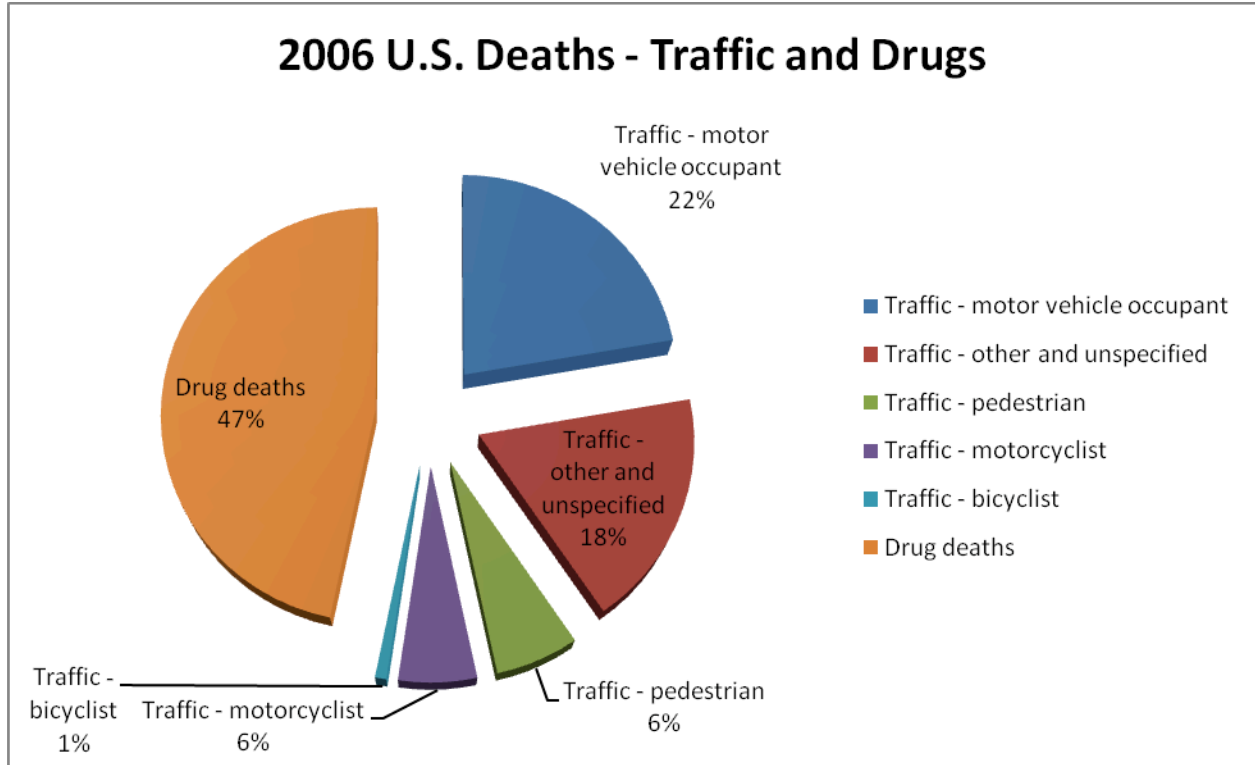
The top killers in 2006 were:

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Stroke
4. Chronic lower respiratory disease
5. Accidents (all non-intentional deaths, including traffic accidents)
6. Diabetes
7. Alzheimer's disease
8. Influenza and pneumonia
9. Kidney disease
10. Blood poisoning
11. Suicide
12. Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis
13. High blood pressure
14. Parkinson's disease
15. Homicide

Some states, including Oregon, showed an anomalous trend, with traffic deaths decreasing while drug deaths rose. But in most of the country, motor vehicles were more lethal than drugs like heroin and Oxycontin.

Oregon's reduced death rate from traffic and increased deaths from drugs has many commentators ignoring the obvious. Perhaps it's not trendy to speak clearly about the dangers of driving, but local punditry would have us expressing shock and horror at the dangers of narcotics, while completely overlooking the hazards in a routine drive – when traffic is actually the greater risk.

As the following chart shows, the total percentage of traffic deaths exceeds that from drugs:



In 2006, accidents resulted in 121,599 deaths, or 5% of all fatalities, an increase of 1.8% over the previous year. Of deaths attributed to accident, motor vehicle-related injuries resulted in 43,664 deaths, and other land transports caused an additional 1,181. Drug deaths totaled 38,396.

Over the last decades, some causes of death have become increasingly prevalent, while others have been dropping. The rates of accidental death, meanwhile, have remained high.

Let's all get a little more realistic about relative risks according to cold, hard statistics. Perhaps we need more public service announcements, with more catchy slogans, warning us that driving is a significant responsibility, and not to be taken for granted.

Next time you get behind the wheel, remember that you are potentially taking a risk greater than most addicts – and take special care to be safe. Pass the message to others: driving is not something to take lightly.

After all, if you don't talk to your kids about safe driving, who will?