

National road safety report shows Texas lacks key laws

By Erin Mulvaney | January 15, 2013 | Updated: January 15, 2013 11:31pm

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New York: The state was given a green rating by Road Map to State Highway Safety laws report. The report gave the state a rating of 13 out of 15, ranking it among the 14 best states. (Photo: deltaMike, Flickr)

Texas ranks among the worst states for passing highway safety laws, according to an annual report released Tuesday.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety released the "Roadmap of State Highway Safety Laws" grading all 50 states and the District of Columbia on their performance based on 15 basic traffic safety laws. Texas - the first state to pass an 85-mile-per-hour speed limit last year - joined about a dozen states in the bottom tier.

Texas has 80,000 miles of state-run roadways, and the last day there wasn't a fatality on Texas roads was Nov. 7, 2000, according to the **Texas Department of Transportation**. State lawmakers, however, have been slow to adopt some of the measures the national safety group sees as steps to improve road safety and reduce deaths.

"We know what works to reduce and eventually eliminate drunk driving from our roads," said **Jan Withers**, president of the national **Mothers Against Drunk Driving**. "We now call on state legislatures across the country to do their part."

The U.S. has recently seen the largest jump in traffic fatalities since 1975, a 7 percent increase in crash deaths during the first nine months of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011, according to **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** data.

The report focuses on a new federal incentive grant program that encourages states to enact teen driver licensing laws, ignition interlock laws, distracted driving laws and occupant protection laws. Among the 15 highway safety laws evaluated by the group are seat belt, booster seat and motorcycle helmet measures, in addition to restrictions and requirements for teen drivers, texting bans and tougher impaired driving laws. Texas did not have eight of the 15 recommended laws.

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The report found that an additional 316 new laws need to be adopted in all states to meet the recommendations, including 15 states still needing a law banning all drivers from texting.

Last year, Alabama, Idaho and West Virginia passed an all-driver texting bans, joining the majority of states that have passed such laws. (Some states have laws prohibiting drivers from using cell phones in certain areas like school zones.)

State Rep. **Tom Craddick**, R-Midland, re-filed a texting ban bill for the 2013 legislative session. In 2011, Gov. **Rick Perry** made an unprecedented move of vetoing a texting ban passed during the legislative session, drawing criticism at the time from national highway safety groups.

Bob Kaufman, a Texas Department of Transportation spokesman, responded to the report, saying that TXDOT uses awareness campaigns to prioritize safety, such as the "Click It or Ticket" campaign. He said the campaign has led to seat belt use increasing from 75 percent to 94 percent in the past 11 years.

He also said awareness campaigns have improved behavior in the areas of drunken driving, motorcycle safety and proper child passenger.

"Important to remember, drivers hold the key to driving safely," Kaufman said. "We encourage drivers to adhere to some basic safe driving tips: pay attention, buckle seat belts, put the phone away, never drink and drive, obey all traffic laws and drive to conditions."

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