

NATI ALERTS

OLDER DRIVER SAFETY

Presently, about one of every eight citizens in a given community is over 65 years of age. And, it is estimated that as many as 90 percent of these older Americans, are still licensed to drive.

As we grow older, physical changes occur that affect our ability to drive safely. Eyesight, one of the most critical aspects of driving, begins to deteriorate after age 40. Reaction time and flexibility also diminish as we age.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that if a person lives long enough, physical changes or diminished ability due to disease will alter the performance level of critical skills needed to drive.

Aging Facts:

In ten years, the US population over 65 grew by 47%.

By 2030 there will be 70 million seniors living in the US (Administration on Aging).

In 2000 about 35 million Americans were 65 or older—about one of every eight (US Census).

In 2000, there were 20 million older women and 14 million older men, a ratio of 141 women for every 100 men. The ratio increased with age (US Census).

There are 11 times more seniors (65+) in America than there were in 1900, more than tripling during the last century (US Census).

There are 33 times more people over 85 at the beginning of this century than in 1900 (US Census).

Aging Driver Facts:

Despite lower risk-taking, seniors are more likely to be hurt or die in a car crash (NHTSA).

Only teenagers have a higher crash fatality rate than seniors (IIHS).

Older drivers frailty makes them more likely to hurt themselves rather than others (NHTSA and others).

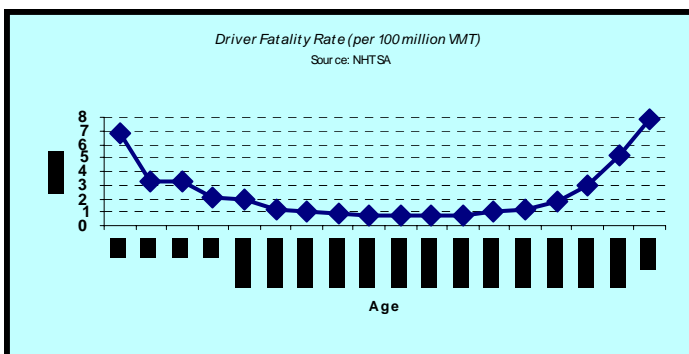
Drivers over 65 are almost twice as likely to die in a crash- over 75 are 2 ½ times more likely to die and those over 85 are almost 4 times more likely to die (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety).

Senior crash fatality rates have climbed while overall fatality rates for all ages combined have remained stable since 1991 (NHTSA).

Older drivers made up 10 percent of all licensed drivers in 2000, compared with 8 percent in 1989 (NHTSA).

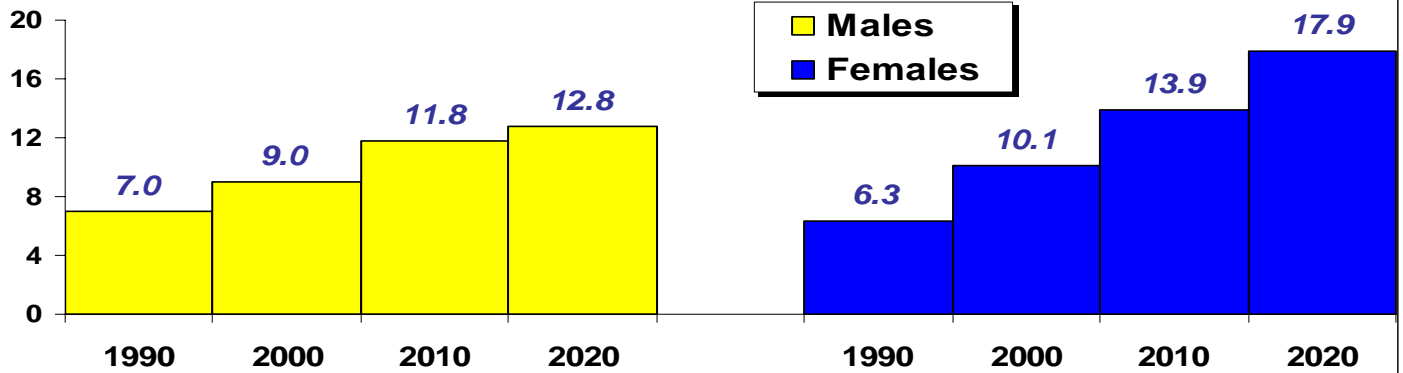
There were 19.1 million older licensed drivers in 2001—a 36% increase from 1990 (NHTSA).

By 2020, there will be more than 40 million licensed drivers ages 65 and older (NHTSA).



Licensed Drivers 70+ (Projected)

Source: NHTSA



Ageing Driver Facts:

In 2002, 81 percent of fatal accidents involving older drivers happened during the day. 75% involved another vehicle (NHTSA).

Ageing causes changes in psychomotor, cognitive and visual ability—necessary for safe motor vehicle operation (Widely cited).

Senior drivers are over-represented in intersection crashes, and senior pedestrians are up to five times more likely to die in crashes than any other age group (NHTSA).

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, about half of fatal crashes in 2002 involving drivers 80 years and older occurred at intersections and involved more than one vehicle.

Training Issues:

Officers need to be trained about aging—how it affects people, its broad impact on society, its impact on police services delivery. They especially need to be trained how an older driver population will affect traffic safety.

Law enforcement officers need to know how to recognize the signs of dementia.

Law enforcement officers need sensitivity training that focuses on the needs of an aging community.

Law Enforcement's Role:

Cite offenders. The scope of the problem is likely understated because officers are reluctant to take enforcement action against “grandma and grandpa.”

Know your state's referral process for driver licensing retesting. Request retests for errant drivers as appropriate.

Build coalitions to effectively channel community resources. Undertake or strengthen Triads.

Act as a referral resource to link seniors, adult children and community outreach systems.

Form Number NATI-04-01



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