

# SAFETY ON THE (SIDE OF) THE ROAD

Late last year, a troubling headline in the Bangor Daily News read, “2015 Deadliest Year for Pedestrians in a Decade, say Maine Police.” During the course of the year, a total of 16 pedestrians were involved in fatal accidents across the state — a statistic that left experts both concerned and puzzled.

It inspired Pret Bjorn, trauma program coordinator at Eastern Maine Medical Center Trauma Care and a longtime member of the Maine Trauma Advisory Committee, to dig into the state archives and review three registries comprising years of data, in an effort to elucidate any determining factors such as the age of the victims, geographic location, time of day, or season of the year.

While no explanation emerged, it did become apparent that Maine has suffered the same or even higher numbers of annual pedestrian deaths in some years prior to the past decade.

“Maine is actually a pretty safe state for pedestrians,” he observed, citing a Centers for Disease Control WISQARS (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System) search that compares state-to-state pedestrian mortality over the past 15 years, in which Maine boasts the sixth-lowest

pedestrian fatality rate in the U.S.

“[Nonetheless,] we surely have seen a recent increase, and we’d be foolish to ignore it, blip or not,” Bjorn said. “The Maine EMS Trauma Advisory Committee and injury-prevention-interested providers all over the state will continue to be on the lookout for trends. We’re deeply mindful of the fact that any trauma is almost always a preventable tragedy, and even our relatively safe and peaceful state is not immune from the unspeakable and inherently unexpected misery of fatal injury. Every trauma death should make us mindful of our day-to-day risks, and each may provide lessons to keep us wary, and thus safer.”

“But let’s not lose sight of the fact that walking from place to place is by no means an inherently dangerous undertaking,” he continued. On the contrary, walking may be among the safest, simplest, and most effective means of staying active and living longer. Many Americans would live healthier and fuller lives if they walked to school or to the grocery store MORE often. It can be done safely. It usually is.”

While the precise reason for Maine pedestrian mortality may be hard to pinpoint, there are good observations, reminders and

considerations for all of us to bear in mind.

Bjorn’s counterpart at Central Maine Medical Center, Trauma Program Manager Tammy Lachance, noted that as the percentage of our geriatric population increases, there will likely be an increased need for engineering changes to accommodate them. For example, many elderly pedestrians need a little more time to safely navigate a cross walk, so it may be appropriate to extend the length of time of the green “walk” signal. And additional crosswalks should be added to busy pedestrian areas, shortening the distance needed to walk to the nearest one.

“Electric cars add a new component to pedestrian safety,” she pointed out. “It is difficult to hear them. I don’t think that we’ve had a major issue with this in Maine, but this has raised attention nationally, and there have been suggestions made to deliberately add a noise to electric cars, so that they will not be sneaking up on pedestrians.”

Bjorn suggests that the following tips are worth taking the time to read and perhaps to discuss with older or younger family members at the dinner table. While they are based on simple common sense, they could just save a life.

## Pedestrian Safety Tips

- **Choose your route carefully.** If you can find sidewalks and crosswalks, use them.
- If you can’t find a better option, **stay deep in the shoulder and walk facing traffic.**
- **Be as visible as you can.** At night, carry a flashlight and wear light colored or reflective clothing.
- **Keep your eyes and ears available to the traffic around you.** Earbuds and smartphones are surely WAY more appropriate for walking than driving; but they still can distract you from the immediate risks of the roadside.
- **Walking home drunk is no substitute for a designated driver.** Or simply choose to stay where you are. You are more likely to be hurt doing ANYTHING when you’re intoxicated.
- **And finally, keep pedestrians in mind when YOU’RE the motorist.** Sadly, several times a year in Maine, it’s not a cat or a skunk or a deer that surprises us over the hill or around the curve. We should all regularly remind ourselves that otherwise good, conscientious drivers are sometimes to blame for uncommon yet unimaginable miseries.



The number of fatal vehicle/pedestrian accidents was up last year in Maine. Both pedestrians and motorists can contribute to traffic safety by paying attention and following common sense measures.

**Flik**  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL  
DINING

GREAT SCHOOL GREAT PARTNERSHIP

Eastern Maine  
Community College  
Great College. Smart Choice.

Technical  
Career &  
Transfer Education