



Since the federal government gave individual states the power to set their own speed limits through legislation effective in December, 1995, all states except for Hawaii have passed measures to increase speed limits. As of September, 1999, 29 states had speed limits posted at 70 mph or higher on some of their highway systems. This is two states more than reported the previous year. The chart [below](#) provides rural and urban interstate speed limits by state.

Montana ended its holdout as the only state without a daytime speed limit for cars and light trucks. A law passed in the Big Sky state became effective on May 28, 1999 limiting noncommercial vehicles to 75 mph on rural interstates and 65 mph on urban interstates.

Speed and impact on crash fatalities

A study released by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) in January, 1999 found that higher travel speeds translate into more fatalities. IIHS reports that in 24 states that passed higher speed limits during late 1995 and 1996, motor vehicle deaths increased during 1996-97. Comparisons were made in these states from the time speed limits were raised through 1997 with corresponding fatality counts for the same months in the six-year period prior to when their speed limits were changed. A control group of seven states where speed limits had not changed during the study period was used for comparison. Ohio was not included in this study. IIHS estimates a 15% increase in fatalities on interstates and freeways, based on its findings. The 24 states included in this study were Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

Speed limits and crash fatalities in Ohio

In 1996, the Ohio General Assembly approved legislation allowing the Ohio Department of Transportation to raise speed limits to 65 mph on designated urban interstates and rural highways for passenger vehicles and commercial buses. Previous state law set the speed limits at 55 mph on urban interstates and rural highways, and 65 on rural interstates.

In Ohio, fatalities declined following the passage of the 55 mph speed limit law in 1974, the oil crisis era. Fatalities in the Buckeye state have been under the 2,000 mark since then with the exception of three years, 1978-1980. Worth noting is the fact that there was a 6% increase in Ohio fatalities in 1987, the year after Congress raised speed limits to 65 mph on rural interstates.

Crash fatalities, according to the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS), have been creeping up for the past four years. There were 1,290 reported traffic fatalities in 1998, compared to 1,268 traffic fatalities in 1997, 1,248 in 1996 and 1,216 in 1995. Crash-related injuries fluctuated during the same four-year period. ODPS figures show 123,785 injuries in 1998, down from 128,296 injuries reported in 1997 and 130,793 in 1996. There were 127,961 injuries reported in 1995.

The chart [below](#) provides a summary of Ohio's speed limit laws since the first one was established in 1908.



A 1999 survey conducted by the Ohio Highway Patrol shows that the average speed of cars and trucks on Ohio interstate highways ranges from 70-80 mph. Speed continues to be the leading contributor to crashes in the Buckeye state.

State Maximum Speed Limits
(For passenger vehicles as of September, 1999)

State	Rural Interstate Speed Limit	Urban Interstate Speed Limit	State	Rural Interstate Speed Limit	Urban Interstate Speed Limit
Alabama	70	70	Montana	75	65
Alaska	65	55		(trucks-65)	
Arizona	75	55	Nebraska	75	65
Arkansas	70	55	Nevada	75	65
	(trucks-65)		New Hampshire	65	65
California	70	65	New Jersey	65	55
	(trucks-55)		New Mexico	75	55
Colorado	75	65	New York	65	65
Connecticut	65	55	North Carolina	70	65
Delaware	65	55	North Dakota	70	55
D.C.	NA	55	Ohio	65	65
Florida	70	65		(trucks-55)	
Georgia	70	65	Oklahoma	75	70
Hawaii	55	50	Oregon	65	55
Idaho	75	65		(trucks-55)	

	(trucks-65)		Pennsylvania	65	55
Illinois	65	55	Rhode Island	65	55
	(trucks-60)		South Carolina	70	70
Indiana	65	55	South Dakota	75	65
	(trucks-60)		Tennessee	70	65
Iowa	65	55	Texas	70	70
Kansas	70	70	Utah	75	65
Kentucky	65	55	Vermont	65	55
Louisiana	70	55	Virginia	65	55
Maine	65	55	Washington	70	60
Maryland	65	60		(trucks-60)	
Massachusetts	65	65	West Virginia	70	55
Michigan	70	65	Wisconsin	65	65
	(trucks-55)		Wyoming	75	60
Minnesota	70	65			
Mississippi	70	70			
Missouri	70	60			

NA=Not Applicable

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety



Based on reports from 12 state traffic authorities, exceeding the posted speed limit or driving at an unsafe speed was the most common error cited in fatal crashes, accounting for 60% of fatal crashes.

(National Safety Council, Injury Facts, 1999 edition)

History of Ohio's Speed Limit Laws

- 1908 The first speed limit was 20 mph outside municipalities, 8 mph inside municipalities
- 1926 35 mph

1938	35 mph
1940	45 mph
1941	50 mph
12/1/42	Gas rationing and a 35 mph speed limit on all roads that had been in effect along the East Coast for 7 months was extended nationally to conserve gasoline and rubber during World War II
8/15/45	50 mph speed limit reinstated
1958	60 mph daytime, 50 mph speed limit at night
1963	70 mph for cars and 55 mph for trucks and commercial tractors on interstates; 60 mph daytime and 50 nighttime on noninterstates
1974	55 mph for all vehicles on interstates and most other highways
1987	65 mph for cars on 900 miles of rural interstates, 55 mph for commercial vehicles weighing more than 8,000 lbs.
1991	65 mph for cars on another 246 miles of interstates
1992	65 mph on 209 miles of rural noninterstates
1996	Speed limits raised to 65 mph on designated urban interstates and rural highways for passenger vehicles and commercial buses

Source: Ohio Historical Society