



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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News Release

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VA, DOT, DOD Steer Vets toward Safe Driving *Deadly Toll from Post-Deployment Car Crashes*

WASHINGTON – With motor vehicle crashes being a leading cause of deaths among combat veterans during the first years after their return home, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Defense (DOD) are working together to reduce these accidents.

Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment Wayne Army, and Acting Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration David Kelly announced the creation of a new program designed to identify needed research involving recently returned veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and to increase awareness of the importance of safe driving among newly-demobilized veterans.

“VA is committed to helping our returning heroes with world-class health care and educational benefits, home loans, job training and now with a specific safe-driving program,” said Secretary Peake. “Together with our partners at DOT and DOD, we will be able to collect and analyze data that will be used to develop a comprehensive outreach initiative to target veterans with specific needs -- and ultimately to save lives.”

Experts in transportation safety, veterans’ health and medical care, and public health are identifying gaps in current knowledge and developing a strategic plan for addressing key research questions, in fields ranging from epidemiology to psychology and biomechanics.

Participants in the strategic planning process include scientists and policy officials from VA, DOT, DOD and Department of Health and Human Services, as well as non-governmental experts. The resulting strategic plan will lay out research needs and identify priorities for the initiative.

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“Our returning combat veterans have already put themselves in harm’s way to protect our way of life. Now it’s our turn to take action,” said David Kelly, Acting Administrator of the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA). “NHTSA can offer knowledge and expertise to address challenges such as these. Working side-by-side with the Department of Veterans Affairs, we are committed to tackling this problem and reducing the number of veterans killed and injured on our nation’s roadways.”

The safe-driving initiative strives to increase awareness of motor vehicle crashes among veterans and the importance of safe driving, seatbelt and helmet usage, and other measures. To reach out to veterans and their families, VA will create a national educational program using the Department’s network of medical centers, community clinics, drop-in counseling centers (Vet Centers), and veterans benefits offices.

The initiative will also include outreach to mobilize national veterans service organizations; the nation’s governors and state police, safety officers, and state highway safety officials; and the private sector - including employers; automobile, motorcycle and sports vehicle dealers and manufacturers; the motor vehicle insurance industry; and driving and motorcycle racing enthusiasts’ organizations. NASCAR legend and safe driving advocate, Richard Petty, will also be an active partner in the initiative.

“Richard Petty Driving Experience (RPDE) is thrilled to be working with VA, DOT and DOD on such a worthwhile project to save veterans’ lives,” said NASCAR legend Richard Petty. “We want to bring more attention to the continuing problem of veteran drivers and their safety through our involvement. Last year alone, RPDE operated over 1,100 event days, ran almost 1 million miles on track and had a staff of professional drivers. We have the commitment, the knowledge to teach, and the infrastructure to take this initiative to many markets.”

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According to the Department of Transportation, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for all Americans between the ages of eight through 34. Men constitute about 70 percent of all traffic deaths. In the past decade, both deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes have gone down in the United States, due to increases in seat-belt use and decreases in alcohol involvement, among other factors.

Nonetheless, motor vehicle accidents remain a major concern in the military and among veterans as the greatest cause of accidental fatalities. Several studies have reported an increase in post-deployment deaths among military personnel who served in a combat zone compared to their non-deployed counterparts, who are in the military but not deployed to a war, after both the Vietnam War and the 1991 Gulf War. Preliminary evidence also indicates this is the case with veterans from the Global War on Terror.

For more information regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Transportation's safe driving initiative for veterans, please visit www.safedriving.va.gov.

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