



## Short Safety Subject

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### **Dangers In The Home And Community Over The Long Labor Day Weekend**

Almost as many Americans will die from falls, drowning, and other incidents in their homes and communities as will be killed in highway crashes this busy Labor Day weekend, the National Safety Council (NSC) warned.



The Council estimates that 474 people may die and 25,100 people may suffer nonfatal disabling injuries in motor vehicle crashes over the Labor Day weekend. The lives of an additional 345 people involved in crashes, however, will be saved because they will be wearing their seat belts.

Americans are becoming increasingly aware of the dangers associated with driving during the holidays. More importantly, they know what they can do to protect themselves - by buckling their seat belts, and making sure children are securely restrained in the back seat in age-appropriate child safety seats or booster seats. If everyone were to buckle up this Labor Day weekend, we would save an additional 128 lives.

On the other hand, many Americans don't yet realize the full extent of the dangers lurking in their homes and communities. During the average period comparable to a long holiday weekend, 471 people will die from accidents in the home and community. What's more, while the highway death rate is slowly declining, deaths and serious injuries in the home and community are on the rise.

In addition to wearing safety belts, the Council urges motorists to follow these safe driving practices in order to survive on the highways. Don't drink and drive. In 1999, 47 percent of all traffic fatalities over the Labor Day weekend involved an intoxicated or alcohol-impaired driver or non-motorist.

Allow enough travel time for frequent breaks on longer trips. Drowsy drivers are an increasing problem in our fast-paced society. Drowsiness can reduce reaction time almost as much as drinking.

On the home front, the NSC estimates that about 6.9 million Americans suffered disabling injuries in the home in 1999, and nearly 28,800 died. Falls in the home or on home premises are the leading cause of accidental death, accounting for 9,600 deaths, or about one-third of all home

fatalities. Other leading causes of death include poisoning, fires, drowning, and suffocation by ingesting food or objects that obstruct breathing.

Older Americans are increasingly at risk of falling at home and being seriously injured or even killed.

All age groups are vulnerable, but older adults are most at risk. In fact, 80 percent of fall-related fatal injuries are to people over the age of 65.

Falls in the community caused an additional 6,800 deaths in 1999. More than 24 percent of people suffering a hip fracture, the most serious result of a fall, die within a year of the fall and another 50 percent never return to their prior level of mobility or independence.

To combat this growing national problem, the National Safety Council offers the following advice:

- Keep floors and stairs clear of clutter. Remove toys, paper, books, clothes and shoes - anything that an older person with failing eyesight might trip on.
- Install grab-bars in bathrooms next to the toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep rugs in place. Use non-skid mats in the bathtub, on shower floors and on linoleum and tile floors.
- Keep items that are used often in cabinets that can be reached without using a step stool. Older people should generally avoid the use of stepstools or ladders to reach objects above their heads.
- Make sure living areas are well lighted. In general, older people need brighter lights to see well.
- Install nightlights on both sides of beds.
- Install handrails and lights in all staircases.
- Make sure eyeglass prescriptions are current. As we age, we need more frequent eye exams. Glaucoma and cataracts occur more frequently in the elderly.
- Make sure medication doses are correct. Have a health-care professional review prescriptions and non-prescription medications frequently.
- People of all ages can benefit from regular exercise. Low-impact exercises that improve balance and coordination are especially helpful for older people.