

3. Safety Emphasis Areas

In the late 1990's The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) conducted an evaluation of national efforts to reduce the number of traffic related fatalities through the on-going Highway Safety Improvement Program. Both AASTO and FHWA concluded that the state's efforts had not been sufficiently effective to lower the number of fatal crashes and two key factors were identified; the states efforts were not focused on the primary factors causing the fatal crashes so that too many of the safety projects that were being implemented were not the result of a data driven mapping process that directly linked crash causation to effective mitigative strategies.

In response, AASHTO and FHWA developed a recommended safety program development process that included disaggregating system wide crash data into twenty-two categories (emphasis areas) dealing with Drivers, Special Users, Vehicles, Highways, Emergency Services and Management. The objective of this first step is to help agencies identify the safety priorities for their system using the specific crash data for their system. In addition, the identification of safety emphasis areas will also assist in subsequent steps in the process by helping reduce the universe of possible safety strategies to the short list associated with specific safety emphasis areas.

This process was first conducted in Minnesota during the preparation of the State's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) and resulted in the identification of the following State wide safety emphasis areas:

- Driver Behaviors – Young drivers, Aggressive driving, Impaired driving and Seat belt usage
- Highways – Road departure and Intersections

An identical process was followed in Olmsted County that resulted in the distribution of severe crashes among AASHTO's twenty-two emphasis areas illustrated in **Figure 3.1**. This exercise indicates the categories where crashes are either over represented based on a comparison to State wide averages or where there is large enough number of crashes to represent an opportunity for a substantial crash reduction. As a result of this exercise, Olmsted County has adopted the following emphasis areas as the highest priority for safety on the local system of highways.

- Driver Behavior – Young drivers, Aggressive driving, Impaired driving and Seat belt usage
- Special Users - Bicyclists
- Highways – Road Departure (County Highways) and Intersections (County Highways and City Streets)

	Emphasis Area	Statewide Percentage (2007 SHSP)	Percentage of Severe Crashes	Olmsted County CEAs
Drivers	Young drivers	24%	34%*	✓
	Unlicensed drivers	11%	--	
	Older drivers	18%	22%	
	Aggressive driving	28%	25%*	✓
	Impaired driving	36%	15%*	✓
	Alert drivers	19%	14%	
	Safety awareness	--	--	
	Seat belt usage	52%	30%*	✓
Special Users	Pedestrians	8%	3%	
	Bicyclists	1%	4%	✓
Vehicles	Motorcycles	9%	19%	
	Heavy vehicles	15%	7%	
	Safety enhancements	--	--	
Highways	Train collisions	1%	0%	
	Road departure	32%	47%	✓
	Consequence of leaving road	Varies	Varies	
	Intersections	33%	48%	✓
	Head-On	20%	8%	
	Safer work zones	2%	--	
EMS	Enhancing Emergency Capabilities	Varies	--	
Management	Information and decision support systems	--	--	
	More effective processes	--	--	

Figure 3.1 Olmsted County Emphasis Areas

Source: MnCMAT Crash Data, 2002-2006. Asterisk- MN SHSP. *Olmsted Co. % = Severe crashes on CSAH or CR divided by Severe Crashes*

The key conclusion is that a focus on these safety emphasis areas represents the greatest potential to significantly reduce the number of severe crashes in Olmsted County.