

Avoiding (Traffic) Death on a Daily Basis

It is near 11:00 pm, and *click click click click* goes my keyboard, a contrast to the quiet hum of the night. My eyelids are heavy with sleep and my fingers move robotically in an attempt to finish a homework assignment. I am in the middle of a sentence when a car drives past, another person heading home after a long day. *Beep beep beep beep!* A driver sounds the horn of the car. I am shaken from my sleepy state at the resonating sound of a collision and shattering glass. Together, my mom, dad, and I head outside to examine the source of the crash. A blue vehicle is parked outside the house, its headlights revealing shards of glass lying haphazard across the road. My mom walks out to talk with the driver, and it is not long before they make their way to the front of the car. “Mangled,” is the word Mom used to describe the damaged headlight area. My parents later informed me that the blue car had been hit by an oncoming car. Thankfully, no one was fatally injured during this incident. Later that night, I was shocked that something so serious as a traffic accident had occurred outside of my family’s house. However, events such as these seem to be more common than I had thought.

79 traffic fatalities have occurred within the state of Hawai'i from January 1st through September 14 of this year. Keep in mind that this number refers only to the number of traffic fatalities, and does not include the number of everyday accidents. Accidents may occur in any neighborhood, on any road, during any time of day or night, and for a number of possible reasons, which include inattention, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and driving without using a seatbelt (or a helmet for motorized bicycle operators). Traffic fatalities do not always refer to incidents involving motorized vehicles, in fact, 25 out of the 79 fatalities were pedestrian fatalities, and 22 out of the remaining 54 fatalities involved motorized bicycle operators (State of

Hawai'i Department of Transportation). But regardless of the type of traffic fatality, a large number of people, a number *too* large, are killed on Hawai'i's many streets and roads each year.

This is not a problem that faces a specific group of people, but one that faces all people. It is also a problem that people will continue to face for the next 50+ years. If nothing is done to counter the high number of traffic fatalities, then it is likely that a large number of people will continue to die (or be harmed) in traffic incidents on Hawai'i's roads every year. The problem will not go away by itself, and we, as the leaders of tomorrow are tasked with initiating change.

One of the causes of traffic fatalities is the lack of seatbelt use. People may decide to drive or ride in a motorized vehicle without using their seatbelts for a variety of reasons, but we should always practice using our seatbelts whenever possible. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "seat belts reduce serious crash-related injuries and deaths by about half." In an attempt to encourage people to buckle-up (and counter potential traffic fatalities), we could create and air several public service announcements which would raise public awareness about the dangers of driving without wearing a seatbelt. Additionally, we could create workshops for children, which would teach them the importance of using their seatbelts. The children will hopefully continue to use their seatbelts as they grow to become adults, and pass these behaviors on to their own children. Another way to counter the large number of traffic fatalities is to implement laws that would require the use of helmets for motorized bicycle operators. The current law requires the use of eye protection for all motorized vehicle operators and passengers, but makes the use of a helmet optional for anyone over the age of 18 (Capitol.hawaii.gov). Helmets are proven to protect people from rather serious head injuries, so it would make sense to require the use of helmets for motorized bicycle operators of all ages.

Clarence T.C. Ching was a kind man who deeply and genuinely cared about the people of Hawai'i, especially those who were less-fortunate or who had low incomes. He donated money to charity in hopes of building a better Hawai'i (The Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation). If Mr. Ching were alive today, he would feel saddened by the increasing number of people who are killed on Hawai'i's roads in traffic accidents. He would feel that the loss of life could have been avoided, and that more loss can yet be avoided if we choose to work together and solve this problem. By working to prevent traffic fatalities, we, like Clarence T.C. Ching are working to build a better Hawai'i as the steps we take today could save lives tomorrow.

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