Headline: Staying in right lane not always simple

Deckhead: ‘Wrong-way’ driving growing concern, leads to grave results

Moving in the wrong direction can lead to grave results – especially if you are behind the wheel of your vehicle.

Fatal, wrong-way crashes on our nation’s highways have become a persistent and devastating threat that are making roadways less safe. A recent data analysis from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found there are approximately 500 deaths per year as the result of crashes on divided highways.

Researchers found that the odds of being a wrong-way driver increased with alcohol impairment, older age and driving without a passenger.

“Wrong-way crashes on divided highways are often fatal as they are typically head-on collisions,” said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

AAA works with National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and other traffic-safety organizations to educate drivers on the deadly impact of wrong-way driving. AAA and NTSB urge state-transportation agencies to adopt driver-based countermeasures that address these factors, such as alcohol-ignition interlocks, strengthened deterrence strategies like sobriety checkpoints, driver-refresher courses for older adults and the installation of more visible signs and signals.

Researchers examined eight factors related to these types of crashes, with these three standing out: alcohol impairment, older age and driving without a passenger. Six in 10 wrong-way crashes involved an alcohol-impaired driver. Those with blood-alcohol concentrations more than the legal limit of .08 were significantly more likely to be wrong-way drivers than non-alcohol-impaired drivers involved in the same crashes.

“Alcohol impairment is, by far, the single most significant factor in the majority of wrong-way driving crashes, which unfortunately has not changed since the NTSB issued its ‘Wrong-Way Driving’ special investigation in 2012,” said NTSB Director of the Office of Highway Safety Dr. Rob Molloy. “The important work done by AAA shows that we need to redouble our efforts to address this safety hazard.”

An alcohol-ignition-interlock device prevents a vehicle from starting until the driver provides a breath sample that registers below a preset limit, usually a BAC of .02.

The data also indicates that drivers older than 70 are more at risk of driving in the wrong direction than their younger counterparts. Previous Foundation research from the AAA Longitudinal Research on Aging Drivers (LongROAD) project found that drivers aged 75-79 spent less time on the road and drove fewer miles per trip than younger age groups. Yet, this same age group significantly represents wrong-way crashes.

Nearly 87% of wrong-way drivers were traveling alone, leading to the belief that the presence of a passenger might offer protection. Passengers could alert drivers that they are entering a one-way road, preventing them from entering the highway in the wrong direction, or alerting them to the error, helping the driver take corrective action before a crash occurs.

AAA reminds drivers to use common sense before getting behind the wheel. If you are driving, don’t drink. If you are drinking, don’t drive. And always remain alert.

Simple requests that too often are taken for granted.

Cutline: LOSING DIRECTION – Driving drunk and senior drivers are most likely to drive their vehicles in the wrong lanes on highways. Image: Brandon Klein. Adobe Stock.