



# NTSB Fact Sheet

December 11, 2012

## **Special Investigation Report: Wrong-Way Driving**

### **Focus of the Investigation**

- The NTSB investigation focused on wrong-way driving crashes that occur on high-speed divided highways, such as interstates and expressways.
- The report includes nine wrong-way collisions investigated by the NTSB.
- The wrong-way driving crashes highlighted in the report occurred in eight states: California, Colorado, Kentucky, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.
- Wrong-way collisions investigated by NTSB resulted in 57 fatalities and 68 injuries and involved 17 passenger vehicles, two motorcoaches, one church activity bus, and four heavy combination vehicles.
- The NTSB also analyzed fatal crash data from 2004 through 2009 to obtain a national perspective of fatal wrong-way collisions in the United States.
- The NTSB analyzed data from 1,566 fatal wrong-way crashes, which resulted in 2,139 fatalities.
- On average, 360 lives are lost each year in about 260 fatal wrong-way collisions.

### **Severity of Wrong-Way Collisions**

- Wrong-way driving crashes are much more likely to result in fatal and serious injuries than other types of highway accidents.
- Over 80 percent of fatal wrong-way driving crashes involve head-on collisions at very high closure speeds. This generally results in more fatalities and more serious injuries.
- A 1989 study by the California Department of Transportation found a fatality rate 12 times greater for wrong-way driving crashes than other types of accidents.
- A 2012 study in Michigan found that 22 percent of wrong-way driving collisions were fatal, compared to 0.3 percent for all highway accident in the same time frame.

## Characteristics of Wrong-Way Driving

- Approximately 60 percent of wrong-way driving accidents involved alcohol.  
*Note: In seven of the nine wrong-way driving crashes investigated by the NTSB, the wrong-way driver had a BAC over 0.15.*
- Nine percent of wrong-way drivers had been convicted of driving while intoxicated within the three years prior to the wrong-way collision.
- Drivers over the age of 70 account for about 15 percent of wrong-way collisions.
- The primary origin of wrong-way driving movements is by entering an exit ramp in the wrong direction. Other actions resulting in wrong-way movement include making a U-turn on the mainline of the highway or using the emergency turnaround through the median.
- 78 percent of fatal wrong-way collisions occur between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- 57 percent of wrong-way collisions occur on weekends (14 percent on Fridays, 21 percent on Saturdays, and 22 percent on Sundays).
- Most wrong-way collisions occur in the lane closest to the median (number one lane or fast lane). In seven of the nine wrong-way crashes investigated by the NTSB, the collision happened in the #1 lane.
- 19 percent of wrong-way drivers were operating a vehicle without proper licensing.