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[Home](#)

[About CERS](#)

[Research](#)

[Events](#)

[Profiles in Rural Safety](#)

[News & Media](#)

[Publications](#)

[Home](#) > [Publications](#) > [Rural Safety News](#) > September 2011

Rural Safety News



News from the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety

[Previous issues](#)

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Rural Safety News is an electronic newsletter of the [Center for Excellence in Rural Safety \(CERS\)](#) at the University of Minnesota. *Rural Safety News* brings you the latest research and resources concerning rural safety.

In this issue:

- [Sustainable safety designs in The Netherlands target driving risks](#)
- [Profiles in Safety: Iowa takes a team approach to rural road safety](#)
- [Study finds staggered sentencing program reduces DWI offenses by 30 percent](#)
- [More rural safety news and resources](#)
 - [CERS seeks topics and speakers for rural safety webinar series](#)
 - [Rural Road Safety Policy Subcommittee planning 2012 workshop](#)
 - [SafeRoadMaps featured at the Minnesota State Fair](#)
 - [CERS research published by TRB journal](#)
 - [Rural Highway Safety Clearinghouse recent additions](#)

Sustainable safety designs in The Netherlands target driving risks

In the 1990s, the Dutch SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research introduced a new road safety vision in The Netherlands: Sustainable Safety. The vision's main goal is to prevent serious crashes by eliminating the conditions and circumstances where crashes can occur. In situations where crash prevention is not yet possible, Sustainable Safety aims to reduce the probability of serious injuries.

Fred Wegman, managing director of the SWOV Institute, outlined the Sustainable Safety vision and highlighted its success in a July 7 CERS webinar.

Instead of focusing on who or what causes a serious crash, Sustainable Safety asks system designers and operators to identify the factors that contribute to the chance and outcome of a crash. This approach allows system gaps—situations where there is an increased risk for a crash—to be eliminated in various stages of the design and construction process. By filling in these gaps, road safety can become less dependent on the choices of individual road users, Wegman said.

"We have to know that human beings make errors, and we do not always obey the rules. What we try to do in the field of planning and design is to adapt and adopt the environment in such a way that the driver has to make safer decisions and cannot make risky decisions as easily. This is critical in designing a safe system," Wegman said.

Implementation of Sustainable Safety began with a series of demonstration projects designed to create support in the professional community, promote cooperation among stakeholders, and communicate plans to the public. The next step was the Start-Up Programme, which consisted of an agreement between the Dutch central government as well as provincial and local authorities. In all, the program included 24 proposals focused on low-cost, innovative solutions to road safety issues. Strategies included installing roundabouts, introducing traffic calming zones, using intensified police enforcement, and implementing reduced speed limits in rural areas.

Overall results of the program, which concluded in 2005, included a 30 percent reduction in roadway fatalities over a 10-year period. During that time, The Netherlands invested more than 3 billion euros on roadway safety initiatives, and the benefits to society have exceeded that cost by a factor of four, Wegman said.

The Dutch public has also adapted well to the changes implemented as part of Sustainable Safety, according to Wegman. "It's part of our traffic system now, and people are accustomed to it. In the beginning, there was some resistance, but now it's just a part of life."

Related resources:

- [Watch the July 7 webinar](#)
- [Download presentation slides](#) (2.43 MB PDF)
- [Institute for Road Safety Research \(SWOV\)](#)



Profiles in Safety: Iowa takes a team approach to rural road safety

In 11 of Iowa's 99 counties, they're a sight as rare as Big Foot or the Loch Ness Monster: traffic lights. Traffic volumes in these highly rural counties are

so low that only stop signs are needed. But that doesn't mean these roads are safe.

Iowa has the nation's ninth-largest network of rural roads and the 15th-highest fatality rate. And like so many other states with large rural road networks, a disproportionate number of Iowa's fatal crashes happen on the state's rural roadways.

In response, Iowa is using multidisciplinary safety teams as part of a multipronged approach to prevent rural road crashes. While a multidisciplinary approach to highway safety is often advocated, few states have had the long-lasting, far-reaching success of the Iowa effort. And while many of these efforts often focus solely on traffic safety in metro areas, Iowa has expanded the use of multidisciplinary safety teams into rural areas as well.

The driving force behind Iowa's multidisciplinary safety teams is the Iowa Traffic Safety Alliance (ITSA), a partnership supported by Iowa's Department of Transportation and Department of Public Safety in cooperation with diverse public and private organizations. The ITSA was formed in the mid-1990s and has been thriving ever since.

"The ITSA is important because no one agency or entity owns highway safety," said Mary Stahlhut, manager of the Iowa Department of Transportation Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan Program. "This partnership leverages the strengths of all the stakeholders toward achieving the common goal of zero deaths."

A big part of the success of the Iowa multidisciplinary safety team effort has been the ITSA's ability to successfully organize safety teams that eventually become self-sustaining. To organize a safety team, Stahlhut advocates the following steps:

- Contact local safety advocates, then have them contact others.
- Explore local need and history.
- Identify the stakeholders and safety champions in the region.
- Identify the most influential people who can make it happen.
- Create a safety steering committee/multidisciplinary safety team.

"Initially, make contact with some of the people you already know—people who should be key players," Stahlhut said. "Remember, the person who can sustain a safety team over the long term is not always the one with the most power in their position, but the one who has the most passion."

After a safety team is formed, creating an action plan and assigning individual tasks will help the group move forward toward a common goal. Eventually, the role of the organizing entity—in this case, the ITSA—will become a support role to connect the local safety teams with the tools, resources, and data they need to accomplish the goals they identify.

According to Stahlhut, who presented a CERS webinar May 26 about multidisciplinary safety teams, the results of this low-cost safety strategy can be substantial. "Not only does it help us address all factors that contribute to traffic crashes and promote the use of crash data," she said, "the synergy and vitality of these teams helps re-energize the safety efforts of individuals and organizations."

Her advice to other organizations considering the creation of multidisciplinary teams to address rural road safety? "Try it. You'll be amazed at the common and ground and insights that diverse safety stakeholders will discover when they address local safety concerns together."

Related resources:

- [Download presentation slides](#) (4.75 MB PDF)
- [Iowa Traffic Safety Alliance](#)
- [Iowa Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan](#)



Mary Stahlhut

Study finds staggered sentencing program reduces DWI offenses by 30 percent

A new study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) demonstrates what Isanti County, Minnesota, Judge James E. Dehn already knows: staggered sentencing prevents drunk drivers from repeat offenses.

The study, published in March 2011, examines intensive supervision programs for serious driving-while-intoxicated (DWI) offenders across the country, including Judge Dehn's staggered sentencing program. It found the recidivism rate of staggered sentencing program participants 30.6 percent lower over four years compared to a group of similar offenders from elsewhere in the state.

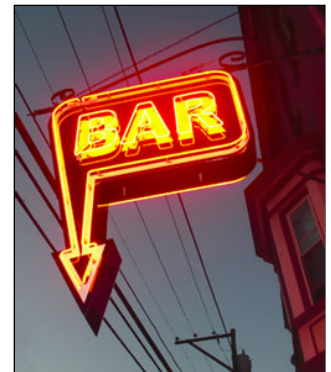
Staggered sentencing is an incentive-driven drunk driving sentencing method with clear rewards and clear penalties, Dehn explained. Despite being labeled by the NHTSA study as intensive supervision program, the program does not require extra work on the part of judges or probation officers. Dehn discussed the staggered sentencing program at a CERS webinar July 27.

According to Dehn, the staggered sentencing program provides an efficient and structured way of processing drunk driving offenders. To increase efficiency, the offender sees the same judge throughout his or her entire probation and only appears in court twice a year. Offenders serve their jail time in installments over three years, but are encouraged to stay on track with their sobriety, check in with their probation officer, and motion the court to have the remaining jail stayed for adherence to sobriety plans. Staggered sentencing also involves 30-day installments of in-home electronic alcohol monitoring during the probation period.

But, as Dehn pointed out, offenders must provide the judge with compelling evidence that they are taking sobriety seriously. Offenders must submit letters from their probation officer, as well as any family, friends, AA sponsors, and therapists, attesting to their sobriety. They must also write the judge a letter explaining what sobriety is like and what triggers them to drink.

Dehn added that the program can be a much less expensive alternative to drug courts, which are losing funding to budget cuts in many states. Dehn estimates that he has saved Isanti County \$350,000 with the program.

Thirteen years after he started staggered sentencing, Dehn remains a vocal proponent of the program. In addition to the new NHTSA study, a previous



study in 2002 by the Minnesota House of Representatives found that the program reduced recidivism by 50 percent and saved \$3,500 per offender in jail bed expenses.

Dehn shared an anecdote to illustrate the success of the program. He told the story of Greg, a man hit on his motorcycle by a drunk driver, Wendy. Greg lost his arm, his leg, and his sight in the crash. When Dehn ordered staggered sentencing for Wendy, Greg was vocal in his opposition. After talking to Wendy, however, Greg became convinced that staggered sentencing did work. He appeared at Wendy's court appearances over the period she was in the program, and now is vocal in his support for the program. As for Wendy, Dehn reports that she is doing well.

"When you give the person the dignity and pride of listening and caring and being concerned about the people in their lives, it makes a difference in their lives," Dehn said. "I think these people step up to the plate."

Related resources:

- [Watch the webinar](#)
- [Download presentation slides](#) (1.1 MB PDF)
- [An Evaluation of Intensive Supervision Programs for Serious DWI Offenders](#) (NHTSA, 2011, 829 KB PDF)
- [Profiles in Rural Safety: Judge James Dehn](#) (*Rural Safety News*, June 2007)
- [Contact Judge James E. Dehn](#)



Judge James E. Dehn

More rural safety news and resources

CERS seeks topics and speakers for rural safety webinar series

The Center for Excellence in Rural Safety is seeking topics and volunteer speakers for the [CERS Best Practices for Rural Traffic Safety Webinar Series](#). Preferred presentations will focus on rural aspects of the four Es—engineering, education, enforcement, and emergency medical services—or other innovative ways to prevent deaths and serious injuries on America's rural roads. The webinar series is sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration. For more information, please contact Stephanie Malinoff, malinoff@umn.edu, 612-624-8398.

Rural Road Safety Policy Subcommittee planning 2012 workshop

A mid-year meeting of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Joint Subcommittee on Rural Road Safety Policy, Programming, and Implementation was held July 25, 2011, in conjunction with the International Conference on Low-Volume Roads in Orlando, Florida. In addition to some internal organizational and planning work, the subcommittee agreed to cosponsor a call for papers as well as cosponsor and help organize a 2012 workshop.

The Joint Subcommittee on Rural Road Safety is the first TRB entity to focus solely on rural roadway safety. The scope of the joint subcommittee includes all research and research-related activities connected to rural roadway safety, the drivers and vehicles that use these facilities, and the needs of the transportation professionals working to implement rural roadway safety policies, programs, and countermeasures. The parent TRB committees of the joint subcommittee are [Transportation Safety Management](#) and [Low-Volume Roads](#).

You can now [sign up to become a friend of the Joint Subcommittee on Rural Road Safety](#) or contact [Keith Knapp](#) for more information about the group.

SafeRoadMaps featured at the Minnesota State Fair

[SafeRoadMaps](#), the crash-mapping tool created by CERS to map every roadway fatality in the nation, was featured at the 2011 Minnesota State Fair in August as part of a transportation-related exhibit by the Center for Transportation Studies and the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Institute. More than 200,000 people attended the fair during the two days SafeRoadMaps was on display. Work on version 4 of SafeRoadMaps is under way to allow users to perform more on-the-fly analysis using a new interface, more analysis tools, and controlled access to sensitive crash data. The upgraded system also will allow potential partners to access and share data more easily.



CERS research published by TRB journal

The August 11, 2011, issue (Volume 2213) of the *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board* published two articles about CERS research:

- [Do Americans Oppose Controversial Evidence-Based Road Safety Policies?](#)
by Lee Munnich (CERS director) and Joseph Loveland
- [Reducing Crash Fatalities on Rural Roadways](#)
by Keith Knapp

Rural Highway Safety Clearinghouse recent additions

- [Distracted Driving: What Research Shows and What States Can Do](#)
Governors Highway Safety Association, 2011
- [Framework for Highway Safety Mitigation and Workforce Development](#)
Utah Department of Transportation, 2011
- [Intersection Safety: A Manual for Local Rural Road Owners](#)
Federal Highway Administration, 2011
- [Roadway Departure Safety: A Manual for Local Rural Road Owners](#)
Federal Highway Administration, 2011

- [Roadway Measurement System Evaluation](#)
Transportation Research Board, 2011
 - [Safety Analysis of Low-Volume Rural Roads in Iowa](#)
Institute of Transportation, Iowa State University, 2011
 - [Sleepiness and Road Crashes: Challenges of Definition and Measurement](#)
Centre for Automotive Safety Research at the University of Adelaide, Australia, 2011
 - [TxDOT Creates Original "Telenovelas" Series to Reach Hispanics](#)
AASHTO Journal, July 8, 2011
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Comments

We would like to hear what you think of CERS *Rural Safety News*. Please e-mail us at cts@umn.edu.

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