

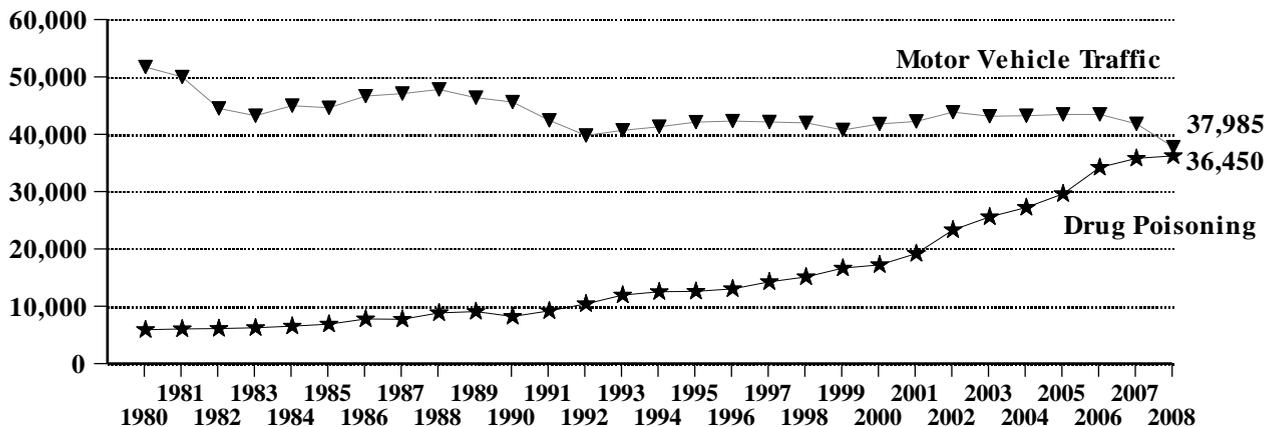
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Number of Drug Poisoning Deaths Now Rival Motor Vehicle Traffic Deaths

Nearly as many people die each year from drug poisoning as from motor vehicle traffic accidents, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The number of drug poisoning deaths, which includes deaths resulting from illegal, prescription, and over-the-counter drug misuse, has increased nearly every year since 1980. The most significant increases, however, have occurred in the last two decades. Since 1990, the number of deaths related to drug poisonings has more than quadrupled, increasing from 8,413 to 36,450 in 2008 (the most recent year for which data are available). This increase is largely due to an increase in drug poisoning deaths involving natural and semi-synthetic opioids (see next week's issue of the *CESAR FAX* for more information). Drug poisoning deaths are now the second leading cause of death from injuries, second only to motor vehicle traffic accidents. According to the authors, "Government agencies and other organizations joined together to achieve great reductions in the number of deaths from motor vehicle crashes in the past three decades. . . . Using a comprehensive, multifaceted approach, it may be possible to reverse the trend in drug poisoning mortality" (p. 6).

Number of Injury Deaths from Motor Vehicle Traffic and Drug Poisoning in the United States, 1980-2008



NOTES: Drug poisoning deaths include unintentional (accidental) (77%), intentional (suicide and homicide) (13%), and undetermined intent (9%) poisoning deaths caused by exposure to narcotics, hallucinogens, antiepileptics, sedative-hypnotics, antiparkinsonisms, psychotropics, nonopioid analgesics, antipyretics, antirheumatics, other drugs acting on the autonomic nervous system, and other and unspecified drugs, medicaments, and biological substances (ICD-10 codes X40-X44, X60-X64, X86, and Y10-Y14 and ICD-9 codes E850-E858, E950.0-E950.5, E962.0, and E980.0-E980.5). Motor-vehicle traffic deaths include pedestrians, pedal cyclists, or occupants, and involve any type of motor vehicle on public roads. When the ICD-10 replaced the ICD-9 in 1999, approximately 5% fewer deaths were classified as motor vehicle deaths and 2% more deaths were classified as poisoning deaths. Injury deaths include deaths that are caused by forces external to the body (e.g., drowning, falls, firearm, motor vehicle traffic, poisoning).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), *Drug Poisoning Deaths in the United States, 1980-2008*, 2011 (available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db81.pdf>).