

Common Bad Driving Habits That Cause Houston Car Accidents

Learn more about why car crashes really happen in the largest city in Texas

Car accidents happen in Houston for many different reasons. Many drivers probably have opinions about exactly why these accidents happen. That's probably why several recent articles in The Houston Chronicle about ["the worst things Houston drivers do"](#) generated so much interest. Some people blame drivers cutting across several lanes of traffic to reach a highway exit at the last minute. Others blame slow drivers in the passing lane on a highway or drivers who turn right on red without stopping.

Why do accidents actually happen in Houston? What are the statistics? What are drivers actually doing that causes car accidents in the greater Houston area? Just how bad are Houston's highways and roads? Below, you can find the answers to these questions as well as additional useful information about motor vehicle accidents in the largest city in Texas.

How bad are car accidents in Houston?

The Houston Chronicle ran a series of in-depth articles about car accidents in Houston two years ago. In the ["Out of Control"](#) series, the newspaper stated that Houston has the worst record for traffic fatalities for any major city in the country. Specifically, Houston had more fatal car accidents per capita from 2001-2016 among the 12 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S.

Houston's number-one ranking was based on statistics in 12 different categories. Each of the 12 cities was ranked in each category and the 12 rankings were then used to determine each city's overall ranking. The 12 categories were:

- Driving under the influence accidents (Houston ranked 1st among the 12 largest metropolitan areas per capita between 2001 and 2016)
- Drugs involved in accidents (Houston ranked 1st)
- Speeding involved (Ranked 2nd)
- Highway accidents (Ranked 2nd)
- Pedestrians on interstates (Ranked 2nd)
- Traffic congestion contributing to accidents (Ranked 2nd)
- Multiple-fatality accidents (Ranked 3rd)
- Trucks involved in accidents (Ranked 3rd)
- Accidents involving road rage chases (Ranked 4th)
- Bicycle accidents involving motorists (Ranked 4th)
- Pedestrian accidents involving motorists (Ranked 5th)
- Intersection accidents (Ranked 5th)

In addition, the 2018 newspaper series noted there were 11 fatal car accidents and 12 deaths on average per week in Houston's nine-county metro area.

Why are accidents so bad in Houston?

The "Out Of Control" Houston Chronicle articles identified five reasons why Houston led the nation for fatal car accidents among major metropolitan areas from 2001-2016. The five contributing factors were:

1. **Long commuting times** – Four out of five drivers in the Houston area spent 29.5 minutes each way driving to work.
2. **High speeds** – Many highways in the Houston area have high speed limits, including portions of the Grand Parkway, where the speed limit is 75 mph.
3. **Lack of enforcement** – Fewer speeding tickets were given in the Houston area in 2016 compared to 2013 and previous years. Tickets for texting while driving in the Houston area were also "lightly enforced."
4. **No automated enforcement** – Unlike some states, Texas politicians have been "staunchly opposed" to automated cameras to catch speeding drivers and drivers who run red lights.
5. **Narrow roads or no sidewalks** – Pedestrians and cyclists on Houston's 6,200 miles of roadway must often walk or ride in traffic since "far less than half of those miles have sidewalks" and less than 300 miles of on-street bike lanes.

Have car accidents gotten worse in Houston?

Unfortunately, since the Houston Chronicle articles first appeared two year ago, the situation has gotten worse. According to the latest annual accident statistics compiled by the [Texas Department of Transportation \(TDOT\)](#), more fatalities and injuries have occurred nearly every year since 2016. In the City of Houston itself, the [highest number of traffic fatalities](#) in the past five years occurred in 2019, according to the latest TDOT statistics.

In 2019, the City of Houston had 253 car accident fatalities. In contrast, there were 204 fatalities in 2015, 245 fatalities each year in 2016 and 2017, as well as 196 fatalities in 2018, according to TDOT statistics.

The number of car accident injuries in the City of Houston reached a four-year high last year, as well. In 2016, there were 23,182 car accident injuries in the City of Houston. Over the next two years, those numbers declined to 21,158 injuries in 2017 and 21,961 injuries in 2018. In 2019, Houston recorded a record 23,470 car accident injuries, according to TDOT statistics.

What are common causes of Houston car accidents?

The Texas Department of Transportation's annual accident report lists the contributing factors in fatal car accidents. The report does not include contributing factors for specific cities or counties. Instead, information is provided for the entire state of Texas.

In recent years, certain contributing factors have appeared near the top of the list of common causes of car accidents in Texas. In 2019, the [top five contributing factors in fatal motor vehicle accidents](#) statewide were:

- Failed to drive in a single lane – 587 fatal accidents
- Failed to control speed – 450 accidents
- Under influence of alcohol – 441 accidents
- Pedestrian failed to yield right of way to vehicle – 435 accidents
- Unsafe speed – 388 accidents

Here are some other, startling [statistics for motor vehicle accidents in Texas](#) in 2019:

- 25 percent of all traffic fatalities (886 out of 3,610) involved drivers under the influence of alcohol.
- 18 percent of traffic fatalities (660 people) were pedestrian fatalities, a 5.4 increase compared to 2018.
- 11 percent of traffic fatalities (377 people) involved people killed in crashes involving distracted driving.

What can be done to make Houston's roads safer?

Based on extensive interviews with road safety experts, The Houston Chronicle's "Out Of Control" series included four recommendations for making Houston's roads and highways safer:

1. **Establish speed limits based on actual road conditions** – This is especially important if a road becomes narrow in certain sections or if there are sidewalks or bike lanes alongside the road.
2. **Issue more traffic citations** – Many drivers might think they can ignore the rules of the road since police issue fewer traffic tickets. They may be right. In 2017, Harris County issued 28 percent fewer speeding tickets compared to 2015.
3. **Educate the public** – People in Houston need to know just how dangerous the region's roads can be for everyone using them. Billboards, television ads and other public outreach measures could help accomplish this goal.
4. **Collect more data** – While there is already plenty of information about motor vehicle accidents in Houston, researchers recommend gathering more data. That way, public safety officials can better understand exactly why car accidents are happening so often in specific places in and around Houston.

If you or a family member has been injured in a car accident in Houston, it's important to have as much information as possible about your crash as well as your legal options. Smith & Hassler's experienced Houston car accident attorneys thoroughly understand the risks drivers face and can answer any questions you might have during your [free case evaluation](#). Simply [contact](#) our Houston law firm to learn more.