

Goal of summit is 'zero fatalities' on Utah roadways

By **Nicole Warburton**
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PARK CITY — Utah has one of the nation's lowest highway fatality rates, but safety advocates from both the public and private sector were told Thursday that they can do more to reduce highway deaths to zero in this state and the rest of the nation.

Statistics show a total of 287 motorists died on Utah roadways in 2006. Of those deaths, a majority involved factors such as alcohol, speeding, improper restraint and distracted driving, according to the Utah Department of Transportation.

Nationwide, nearly 43,000 people were killed in highway accidents.

"One death is too many, and we can stop it," said James Champagne, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, who was a keynote speaker here in Park City at the Zero Fatalities Safety Summit.

Champagne was applauded by about 250 law enforcement officers, health workers, transportation officials and safety advocates gathered for the two-day safety conference. He told of how as a new law enforcement officer 40 years ago, he came upon his first fatal crash: a young man who had been drinking and driving.

Training didn't prepare him for that incident, and it could have been prevented, Champagne said.

"Accidents mean that God intervened and nothing could have changed," he said. "Crashes are preventable."

He then called on the group to join together and fight for the goal of "zero fatalities" on Utah roadways. Champaign said more can be done to educate the public about poor driving behaviors. More also can be done to enforce illegal actions such as driving while drunk, talking on a cell phone and speeding.

"I promise you, when the public believes an enforcement is taking place, people will drive the speed limit," he said.

Robert Hull, director of traffic and safety for the Utah Department of Transportation, said he was hopeful conference attendees would network and find ideas on how to reduce fatalities. Several breakout sessions were scheduled for the conference, including one on teen drivers, and another on motorcycle safety.

About two years ago, UDOT and other state agencies created a "zero fatalities" campaign, with the goal to reduce fatalities on Utah roads to zero. For more information, go to: www.zerofatalities.com.

E-mail: nwarburton@desnews.com