



- HOME
- FREE ACCESS
- Breaking News
- Pruden on Politics
- Commentary
- Contact Information
- About Us
- Editorial Advisory Board
- Getting It First
- FOR OUR SUBSCRIBERS
- White House
- Capitol Hill
- National Security
- Federal Agencies
- Archives
- National Weekly Edition
- Capital Contacts
- SUBSCRIBE!
- SITES WE'RE WATCHING
- The Washington Times
- DrudgeReport
- Human Events Online
- American Spectator
- National Review Online
- Breitbart.com

 printer friendly format  email page

Issue Date: www.insightmag.com - Aug. 8-14, 2006, Posted On: 8/8/2006

Illegal alien drivers cramming U.S. roads, causing auto fatalities as more states issue permits

Special to Insight on the News by David Walsh



Overcrowded roads: Traffic in Atlanta (AP)

The statistics are, in a word, sobering. According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) every 14 seconds someone in North America is injured in a traffic accident. Every 13 minutes, someone is killed in one. Every year, more than 3,000 children ages 4 to 8 are killed in car crashes.

Increasingly, and in disproportionate numbers, the drivers are Latino—many of them illegal aliens. Motor vehicle mishaps, NHTSA says, are the leading cause of death for Hispanics ages 1-34, and the sixth leading cause of death for all ages—

surpassed only by heart disease and cancer.

And, while the numbers for Latinos overall clearly are high (and the topic of quiet community and government outreach programs, wellness task forces, and drug, alcoholism and separation anxiety counseling), for illegals they likely are especially so.

That's because increasingly illegal aliens work "off the books" in this country. The numbers of illegals driving without permits or drivers' training—let alone proficiency with English—are unknown but reckoned to be large. Some 800,000 aliens a year enter this country illegally, adding to the millions already here.

That about a dozen states (the latest, Maryland) knowingly issue illegals driving permits contributes to the mayhem, according to police officials.

The chief causes of the Latino-involved accidents are, understandably, those that can make driving in Mexico, South and Central America a harrowing experience—namely, the boastful Machismo ("Macho") culture, use of intoxicants, speeding, reckless driving, and failure to secure infant passengers. Even Latino females are embracing alcohol, illicit drugs, speeding, and other reckless driving behaviors.



What
Kind of
Water
are YOU
Drinking



As troubling, in Latin cultures it's thought that imbibing eight to ten drinks before driving is all right, whereas in the U.S. the figure is recognized to be just two.

All such accident risk factors, according to a little noted, but broad-scoped NHTSA study from 1995, entitled "Highway Safety Needs of U.S. Hispanic Communities," have been imported stateside.

Despite disturbing trend lines, however, officers in many jurisdictions are barred or discouraged from asking accident suspects' or survivors' immigration status.

The restrictions on immigration queries bothers Jim Kouri, a member of the National Association of Chiefs of Police who's had long experience in New York City law enforcement. He told *Insight* that often, "From my own professional experience, I encountered illegal aliens who were in accidents while driving unregistered and uninsured vehicles. Procedure was you gave them a traffic citation in lieu of arrest—with a court date—and impounded the vehicle."

However, "The drivers never showed up for court," said Mr. Kouri, "and in fact gave false identification. They never attempted to retrieve their vehicles from the impound lot." When the illegals wanted another ride, "they would just buy or steal a new car."

Mr. Kouri and his colleagues "were not permitted to ascertain their immigration status. Their IDs were usually fraudulent or stolen."

That mirrors the Border Patrol's experience with "no-show" illegals: arrestees ordered to appear for administrative hearings, but who instead routinely abscond after release.

Mr. Kouri stressed such "catch and release" policies were prevalent nationwide, in and out of the auto accident domain.

"There are many big city police departments," he said, "that prohibit officers from asking a person in their custody about immigration status, or from calling ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] whenever they apprehend someone they know is an illegal alien. This includes New York City where I worked."

Latinos are by far the largest minority group in the U.S., their numbers reaching well beyond the accustomed metropolitan areas and through broad swaths of hinterland.

No matter illegals' troubling involvement in auto mishaps, the ACLU and various Latino advocacy groups like La Raza favor states granting them the driving privilege. Where the privilege does not exist, the organizations agitate for changes to the law.

The ACLU even suggests that allowing police officers to demand suspected illegal aliens produce identity documents is right out of police state tactics. Other objections are that it is racism or ethnic profiling if what are deemed too many Latinos are arrested or detained, no matter how frequent their involvement in auto wrecks.

The ACLU and other watchdog groups have successfully sued departments across the country for bias. A frequent court-ordered "redress" is diversity training for officers.

This, despite national polls showing at least 70 percent of the public opposes illegals being granted the driving privilege.

Still, the law enforcement community appears to turn a blind eye in the matter of illegal immigration generally. Of the reticence, Mr. Kouri

observed, "The police chiefs' association does an annual survey on different topics, but there [have been no] questions ... regarding illegal aliens."

Even winking illegal-versus-legal accident statistics out of the police or government is difficult.

"That's a tough one. I myself attempted to find stats on illegal alien traffic accidents. It was right after a story on Fox News about an illegal alien who killed two people driving under the influence. He had been arrested twice before," Mr. Kouri said.

There is a special database called LESC (Law Enforcement Support Center) set up by the Justice Department post-9/11; it's available for "call-ins" by police seeking suspects' immigration status. But, said Mr. Kouri: "I'm certain it's a voluntary program, and police agencies don't always submit information or use it to ID illegals."

Why? Because of the overarching taboo against arresting Hispanics. Mr. Kouri explained: "Most police organizations tend to stay away from the topic so as not to create a political firestorm."

Mike Cutler is a fellow of the Washington, DC-based Center for Immigration Studies, which opposes illegal immigration. He agrees the problem of illegal alien drivers is worsening. "[Illegals] are really doing a lot of VTL's [vehicle traffic law violations]" across the nation, he said.

Mr. Cutler tied officers' timidity about asking drivers' immigration status to "sanctuary laws" implemented by many local and state governments. Some, like Los Angeles' Special Order 40, specifically ban the querying of Latino subjects. (This order now is the subject of a California court case brought by Judicial Watch, a conservative group.)

Mr. Cutler, a senior inspector and senior special agent with the Immigration and Naturalization Service before retiring in 2002, said such edicts are of a piece with the "don't ask, don't tell" ethos. It's one that applies to—and, in immigration terms, largely indemnifies—Latinos across the board.

The accident related policies are, he said, "all part of interior enforcement not being done properly." Such "unbelievable" restrictions are emblematic of the failure of immigration enforcement overall, Mr. Cutler added.

He said the "hands-off" situation is so bad that in some cities like Los Angeles, even officers who had arrested illegal alien gang members are barred from calling ICE, "even though they know this guy has done time for rape, or drugs or guns—and know that he's been ordered deported."

According to Special Order 40, Mr. Cutler further explained, an officer "can get himself fired if he reports to immigration seeing this guy standing on a street corner." As well, "There are other communities that don't want the cops to notify 'immigration' no matter what."

Of the illegal-tracking LESC database, Mr. Cutler was hardly more sanguine. He said it was "part of what I've come to call 'Operation Backrub'—a feel-good creation." If LESC tells arresting officers a vehicular manslaughter suspect is an illegal, "limited resources" often means ICE agents will fail "to show up to take him off their hands."

Mr. Cutler concluded that since he left the INS in 2002, the immigration problem has become "an even bigger train wreck" than it was previously.