AAA: Public Less Worried About Dangerous Driving

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are much less worried about drunken, drowsy and aggressive driving than they were four years ago even though traffic deaths have begun to edge back up, according to a national survey released by AAA.

The share of people who said they believe texting or emailing while driving is a very serious threat declined only slightly over the same period, from 87 percent in 2009 to 81 percent in 2012. More than 80 percent of those surveyed considered texting while driving a "completely unacceptable behavior," but 1 in 4 people admited doing so within the previous month.

Concern about risks of talking on a cellphone behind the wheel remained consistent with about 58 percent of those surveyed over the four years saying they consider it a "very serious threat." On the other hand, 68 percent of those surveyed over the period said they had recently used a cellphone while driving.

The findings being released Thursday are based on 11,000 interviews with people of driving age from 2009 to 2012 conducted on behalf of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Some of the drivers may have been interviewed more than once over the four years, AAA said.

"Motorists may be growing more complacent about potential safety risks behind the wheel," said Peter Kissinger, the foundation's president and CEO. "A 'do as I say, not as I do' attitude remains common with many motorists consistently admitting to engaging in the same dangerous behaviors for which they would condemn other drivers.

There were more than 34,000 traffic deaths in 2012, a 5.3 percent increase. That was the first annual increase in seven years, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. More than 2.3 million people annually also suffer serious injuries from crashes.

The share of people who said they believe driving after drinking is a very serious threat declined from an overwhelming 90 percent in 2009 to 69 percent in 2012. The share of people who said they consider driving after drinking "completely unacceptable" also declined, but less dramatically — from 95 percent in 2009 to 89 percent last year. Fourteen percent of those surveyed acknowledged driving when they thought their blood alcohol levels were close to or possibly over the legal limit last year.

Driving when so drowsy that it's difficult for a driver to keep his or her eyes opened was viewed as a serious threat by 46 percent of those surveyed last year, down from 71 percent in 2009.

The share of people who said they consider running a red light when a driver had time to stop to be completely unacceptable also declined, from 77 percent in 2009 to 70 percent in 2012. More than a third — 38 percent — admitted to running a red light within the previous month.

About three-quarters of those surveyed said it's unacceptable to drive 15 mph or more over the speed limit on residential streets, but far fewer — from 39 percent to 46 percent over the four years — considered it unacceptable to speed on freeways.

Part of the problem may be that public and media attention to highway safety has been waning, said Jonathan Adkins, a spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association, which represents state highway safety offices.

Four years ago, then-Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood launched a federal campaign against distracted driving, attracting massive attention to the issue of texting and talking on the phone behind the wheel. About the same time, claims of Toyota cars with stuck accelerators were prominent in the news and the focus of congressional hearings.

County

From Page 1A

campground, which has a conditional-use permit to exist in the zoning district.

"Anything beyond that requires a building permit," Garrity said.

Larson told the commission that he believes Garrity is misinterpreting the zoning ordinance.

"We have complied with the zoning code, the conditional-use permit, the FEMA floodplain regulations and the state campground regulations," he said. "We believe we are in full compliance."

Larson related how, during the Missouri River flood of 2011, beavers and an abundance of water killed many of the trees at the campground.

"We lost all our shade," he said. "That's why we started building patio shades. The campers tried these canvas gazebos, and they don't hold up worth a darn in the wind. So someone said, 'Why don't we put the four posts in the ground and put some metal on top of it so the wind can go through it?' It worked great, so other people were doing it. That how it developed."

A previous zoning administrator had said a building permit was not needed for the patio shades, Larson claimed. Plus, because they are personal property and are removed by the camper, he said he couldn't see how a permit could be required.

"All I want to do is be a good campground," Larson stated.

John Blackburn, the attorney representing Larson's Landing, said that a "blanket rule that 30-some patio shades are illegal because they are structures seems to be striking with an iron hand where it is not needed."

He suggested that a variance be issued for the campground to allow the patio shades or that the commission find Larson's Landing in compliance with the zoning ordinance.

Many residents of the campground were present during the meeting and testified on behalf of keeping the patio shades.

"Every year for the last seven years, my family comes up here every weekend from the first of April until Doug kicks us out in October," said Susan Johnston, who has a shade over her camper. "We want to be comfortable. The reason we built a shade is, if you've ever sat out on the sand by a camper, you know how hot it gets and, this summer, how wet it gets. The shade protects us and our camper from the elements.

"We don't consider Larson's Landing just a campground. It's a really special place for us. We're a community. I don't know your zoning laws. I just know we built what we thought complied."

Harvey Steppat, who lives near Larson's Landing, supported Garrity's ruling.

"What I've seen going on down there is pretty much do whatever you want to," he said. "It was sure nice last weekend. I didn't have to listen to all the hammers and saws. I actually enjoyed the weekend, for a change."

Garrity said that if the patio shades are allowed at Larson's Landing, other campgrounds will want them, too.

"It makes natural sense," he stated. "Why wouldn't I allow a structure to be built on a camper in my campground? Then I'm assured they're going to come back again. It's good business sense, but it's not what we want in that district. Do we want that kind of haphazard building out there?"

Garrity also pointed out that he has been appointed by the federal government to act as the floodplain administrator for the county. As part of the agreement for allowing the campground in the floodplain, everything in it has to be removable within 48 hours.

The long-term development of the Highway 52 corridor has to be considered, Garrity added.

"How are we going to develop the area out there so that it would be most conducive for our economic development and the best prospects for our area in the future?" he asked. "We do want sewer out there. We do want good facilities out there. We want attractive areas out there."

When the commission discussed the issue among themselves, there was some empathy for the desire to have shade.

"I understand completely why they need shade down there," Commissioner Donna Freng said. "But then someone wants to put up a wall (on their patio shade). Someone wants to put up two walls. Now, we've got sheds going up. Pretty soon you've got foundations and carports. It's push, push, push. We can't allow people just to push and then ask for forgiveness. That's not how it works."

After debate about what constitutes a structure, whether all the patio shades need to be removed and whether the time allowed to remove them could be expanded beyond 30 days, the commission members came to the same conclusion.

"The rules are somewhat confusing," Commissioner Mark Johnson said. "But when you really break it down, you've got a campground in an R-2-zoned district. The people that live adjacent to this campground are expected to follow R-2 guidelines. They have every right to expect that their neighbors will follow the R-2 guidelines, as well."

In a unanimous decision, the commission approved a motion upholding the zoning administrator's decision to have the structures constructed without building permits to be removed within 30 days.

During the dialogue, Garrity said that the time is probably approaching to incorporate a comprehensive set of rules for campgrounds into the zoning ordinance.

The commission supported the pursuit of such rules, which can take 6-12 months to craft and finalize.

"Down the road, I would like to see an ordinance just for campgrounds," Commission Chairman Bruce Jensen said. "I think it's a unique situation (because of the amount of camping that is done in the Yankton area). That's definitely going to have to happen, or we're going to be here again."

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage

Obama

From Page 1A

should be able to get it."

Republicans on Capitol Hill weighed in quickly with criticism. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the top Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, cast the proposal as government overreach and suggested a state-by-state approach would be preferable.

"Washington needs to be careful about taking a good idea for one state and forcing all 6,000 institutions of higher education to do the exact same thing, turning Washington into a sort of national school board for our colleges and universities," Alexander said.

For colleges and universities, millions of federal aid dollars could be on the line if schools are downgraded under the government rating system. However, if colleges line up against the idea of tying ratings to federal aid, the proposal would face nearly impossible odds. Almost all members of Congress have colleges or universities in their districts, and a coordinated effort to rally students and educators against the plan would probably kill it quickly.