The head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently declared road rage to be the primary traffic problem in the United States.

The NHTSA states that 66 percent of all traffic deaths each year can be traced to aggressive driving such as passing on the right, speeding through red lights, and tailgating. Aside from fatalities, another astounding 12,610 injuries were caused by aggressive driving.

The NHTSA phone survey revealed that over half of the survey participants noticed drivers who were speeding all or most of the time on surface streets or interstate highways. Drivers rated these driving habits as most hazardous:

- Illegally passing a school bus (95%)
- Racing against another vehicle (90%)
- Ignoring stop signs (84%) or traffic lights (83%)
- Ignoring railroad flashing lights (82%)
- Cutting another driver off (80%)
- Passing in a zone marked no passing (80%)

The NHTSA also indicates that there has been an increase of nearly 51 percent in accidents caused by aggressive driving tactics. Of those, some involved the use of firearms, other weapons, or using the vehicle as a weapon.

The increase in traffic over the last decade has been staggering. The trend seems to be that as traffic becomes more congested, aggressive driving tactics are on the increase. The most extreme example of aggressive driving – road rage – has increased by over 50% in the last six years alone.

What is the cost of aggressive driving tactics? Leaders in the insurance industry estimate that over $50 billion in annual losses can be laid at the feet of aggressive drivers.

The cost is borne by all the drivers who pay for automobile insurance. The cost in lives is borne by individual spouses, families, and children.
ROAD RAGE

The NHTSA defines aggressive driving as “behavior that endangers or is likely to endanger people or property. Drivers justify aggressive driving because they are “late for work” or the other driver “drives like an old lady”. A few indicators that you may be an aggressive driver are that you cut another driver off, your speed is excessive for the road conditions, and you ignore traffic signs such as school zones or 4-way stops, or simply that you speed.

FEELING OF POWER

When an individual is driving and has total control of a two-ton vehicle, he can sometimes let that power go to his head. He may feel more in control. Because drivers are frequently anonymous to others, they may be tempted to vent their stressful feelings if they are upset. And road rage is not limited by gender. Women are as apt to drive aggressively as a man.

TIPS FOR SAFER DRIVING

• Concentrate on your driving, not on the radio, eating, putting on makeup, talking on your cell phone, texting on your cell phone, or on your passengers.

• Obey all traffic controls to include posted speed limits and no passing zones. Accept that a yellow light is a warning that the traffic light is about to change and not an indicator to stomp on the gas to rush through the intersection.

• Do not tailgate. Keep a safe distance between yourself and the vehicle in front of you. Don’t assume that your reflexes are sufficient to brake in time if the other vehicle suddenly stops.

• Do not dart in and out of traffic. Weaving between lanes drastically increases your chance of having an accident. Do not attempt to “make up time” by indulging in this tactic.

• Always drive in the right or middle lanes, never in the “fast” left lane. Use the left lane for passing, and then return to the middle or right lane. Don’t ride in the left lane because you “hate passing” other vehicles.

• Stay alert and watch for changing driving or traffic conditions, especially in congested areas.

• If you see a vehicle nearby that appears to be driving in an unsafe manner such as weaving or driving too aggressively, give it room. Blowing your horn, yelling, or “giving him the finger” will not help and may make the driver more aggressive.

• Be courteous. When others signal to change lanes, yield to them. Turn on your blinkers to change lanes or signal that you are about to turn.

GENDER AND AGE DIFFERENCES

Unsafe behavior is more likely to be committed by males than females. Men also enjoy the “rush of speed” more than women (46% vs. 32%) and don’t worry as much about having an accident.

Young drivers are more apt to commit driving acts that are unsafe than older, more experienced drivers. Even the smallest difference in age and experience can mean a large difference in how we react.