



COMMUNITY TRAFFIC SAFETY COALITION 2014–2023 CRASH REPORT



Community Traffic Safety Coalition

A program of the Santa Cruz County
Health Services Agency's Public Health Division

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Community Traffic Safety Coalition 2014–2023 Crash Report



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Summary

Traffic fatalities and serious injuries are a major public health issue in Santa Cruz County. Based on reported data, a motorist, bicyclist, or pedestrian is involved in a serious crash once every two days in the county. This report aims to raise awareness of local traffic safety issues and mobilize a collective call to action. Traffic fatalities and severe injuries can be prevented through Vision Zero's Safe System Approach, which addresses street design, speed, vehicle technology, post-crash care, and individual behavior.

The data presented in this report were collected from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and the California Transportation Information Mapping System (TIMS). In 2022, the most recent year for which OTS data is available, Santa Cruz County ranked 11th highest (or worst) of all 58 California counties for crash victims killed and injured. Furthermore, our county ranked among the highest for bicyclists and pedestrians killed and injured, alcohol involved fatalities and injuries, as well as speed related and nighttime fatal and injury crashes.¹

The data collected from TIMS include fatal and serious injury crashes reported to law enforcement from 2014–2023. Crash trends indicate an overall increase in people killed or seriously injured (KSI) during this time frame. A total of 224 individuals were killed and 1,456 seriously injured. This is an average of 22 fatalities and 146 serious injuries each year. Moreover, individuals who bike or walk in our community are disproportionately impacted. Bicyclists and pedestrians experience 30% of reported fatalities and severe injuries despite representing 7% of the overall commuting population.^{2,3} There were 12 reported bicyclist fatalities and 242 serious injuries, and 65 reported pedestrian fatalities and 188 serious injuries.²

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) is committed to promoting traffic safety policies and strategies. The Coalition urges community members to contribute to traffic safety efforts. Some different ways to contribute include advocating for both roadway improvements, such as separated bikeways, and policy changes, such as reduced speed limits; driving within the speed limit and observing traffic safety laws; participating in county-wide traffic safety campaigns; and becoming a member of CTSC. Together, our community can create safer roadways for all—whether driving, walking, biking, or using public transit.

Introduction & Purpose

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) of Santa Cruz County developed this county-wide crash report to highlight the ongoing impact of traffic violence in Santa Cruz County. From 2014-2023, 224 individuals were killed and 1,456 seriously injured in collisions on our roadways. The Coalition hopes that by sharing this crash data, our community will advocate for change and prioritize traffic safety as a major public health issue in our county.

Traffic crashes have a broad and significant impact, affecting individuals, families, and the wider community. These impacts are physical, emotional, social, and financial, with long lasting consequences.

Watsonville resident, Victor Kimura, shares what happened to him after he was struck by a vehicle while walking his dog on November 2, 2018:

"Fourteen bones were broken in my body. My jaw was broken in three places, and the brain concussion was severe enough that I lost parts of my memory, most of my sense of smell, much of my ability to taste certain kinds of food, and my sense of direction. I'm at the point now, after over six years, where I can move around by virtue of a cane. All athletic endeavors have ceased, which included running, walking, tennis, racquetball, bowling, basketball, baseball, and weightlifting."

—Victor Kimura

If you or someone you know was seriously injured or lost a loved one in a crash, [Families for Safe Streets](#) offers support resources.



Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of deaths and injuries in the United States. In 2022, almost 44,000 people were killed in traffic crashes, which is more than 120 people killed every day. Deaths from crashes in 2022 resulted in over \$470 billion in total costs. There were also over 2.6 million emergency department visits for traffic injuries.⁴ Yet, traffic fatalities and injuries do not make headlines like those from gun violence or other violent deaths and injuries. To improve roadway safety, communities need to actively raise awareness regarding traffic violence and mobilize a collective call to action.

CTSC includes representatives from law enforcement, transportation, public works, health and injury prevention, schools, and bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups. The mission of CTSC is to prevent traffic-related injuries and fatalities for all road users, with a focus on people bicycling and walking. CTSC envisions safe, accessible, and equitable transportation for all. The mission and vision align with **Vision Zero**, an international strategy that aims to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all.

Traffic fatalities and serious injuries are preventable and not random, unavoidable accidents. Vision Zero acknowledges that people make mistakes, but those mistakes do not have to cost lives. Through Vision Zero's **Safe System Approach**—a holistic framework that addresses street design, speed, vehicle technology, post-crash care, and individual behavior—communities can prevent deaths and serious injuries. Together, we can ensure safer travel for all.

"Traffic violence is not an accident. It is preventable, not inevitable, and not acceptable in our community. It is a public health issue we are all responsible for changing. When we work together to create safer streets for our residents, it demonstrates the value we hold for each precious life, and every life in Santa Cruz County."

—Rebecca Downing

Board Chair, Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District Board Chair

[Learn more about Vision Zero](#)



Methods

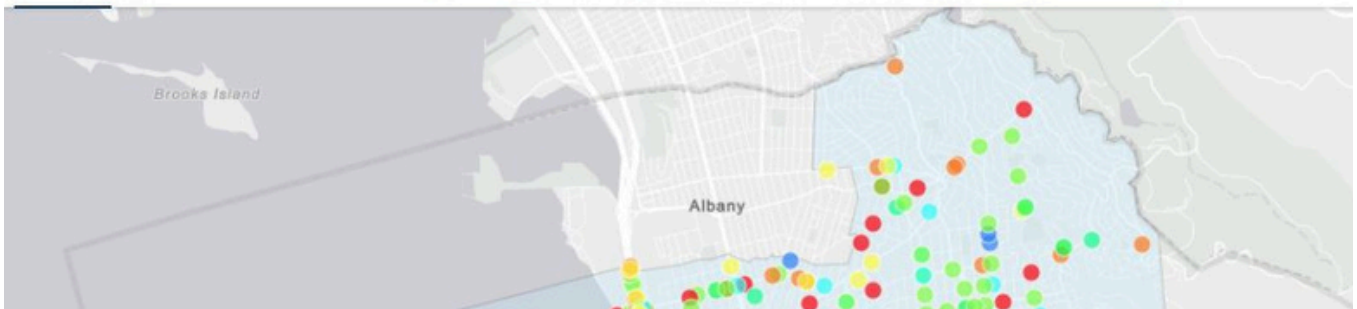
This report presents the results from the 2022 statewide Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) Crash Rankings. The data for these rankings are collected from the California Highway Patrol (CHP) Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS).

The report also presents serious crashes that occurred in Santa Cruz County from 2014–2023 based on data collected from the California Transportation Information Mapping System (TIMS). TIMS obtains its crash data from SWITRS. While the TIMS data from 2014–2022 are final, the data from 2023 are provisional and subject to change. The Coalition will continue to develop county-wide crash reports as more current data becomes available.

The data presented in this report only include crashes that were reported to local law enforcement agencies and collected by CHP in the SWITRS database. The data do not include collisions that may have occurred off-road, nor does it include reports from medical providers or self-reported incidents.

Transportation Injury Mapping System

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[Learn more about and access TIMS data](#)

Santa Cruz County Crash Rankings



The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) provides annual crash rankings for California counties and cities. The rankings were developed so that counties and cities could compare their traffic safety statistics to those of other counties and cities. Counties are assigned statewide rankings, while cities are assigned population group rankings. The rankings are based on a variety of factors, including observed crash counts, population size, and total vehicle miles traveled. This report compares Santa Cruz County's 2022 crash rankings with rankings from 2017–2021. According to the 2022 rankings, which are the most recent, Santa Cruz County **ranked 11th highest (worst) of all 58 California counties** for total victims killed and injured in traffic collisions.

2022 Statewide OTS CRASH RANKINGS

Santa Cruz County **ranked among the 10 highest (worst)** counties for the crash categories in the below three tables involving motor vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

**Lowest Ranking
(Best)**

58th

**Middle Ranking
(Average)**

29th

**Highest Ranking
(Worst)**

1st

Santa Cruz County consistently ranks high for bicyclists and pedestrians killed and injured in roadway collisions. From 2017–2022, our county ranked in the top 5 for bicyclists killed and injured. Our county ranked in the top 17 for pedestrians killed and injured in all years except 2019, and we ranked 5th in both 2021 and 2022. We ranked in the top 12 for bicyclists under the age of 15 category, and in the top 11 for pedestrians ages 65 and older category in all years except 2019 when we ranked 23rd and 52nd, respectively.

Crash Type (victims killed and injured)	2022 SCC Crash Ranking
Bicyclists	2nd
Bicyclists (under age 15)	2nd
Pedestrians	5th
Pedestrians (ages 65+)	5th

Santa Cruz County also ranks high for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists killed and injured where alcohol was involved. Except for 2019, we ranked in the top 10 counties for fatalities and injuries where an underage driver had been drinking alcohol. We are seeing **alarming new trends** in the other two alcohol-related categories. Our county went from ranking 19th for fatalities and injuries where a driver between the ages of 21–34 had been drinking in 2021 to ranking fifth in 2022. Similarly, our ranking for fatalities and injuries involving either a pedestrian, bicyclist, or driver that had been drinking increased from 14th in 2021 to second in 2022.

Crash Type (victims killed and injured)	2022 SCC Crash Ranking
Alcohol Involved	2nd
Had Been Drinking Driver (under 21)	2nd
Had Been Drinking Driver (ages 21–34)	5th

The county is revealing other **alarming new trends** for speed related and nighttime fatal and injury crashes. Our ranking for the nighttime crash category increased from 17th in 2021 to 9th in 2022. Our ranking for the speed related crash category increased even more significantly from 23rd in 2021 to fifth in 2022.¹ This is especially alarming since **speed is a major factor** in fatal crashes, contributing to 29% of fatalities in the U.S. in 2023.⁵

Crash Type (fatal and injury crashes)	2022 SCC Crash Ranking
Speed related	5th
Nighttime	9th

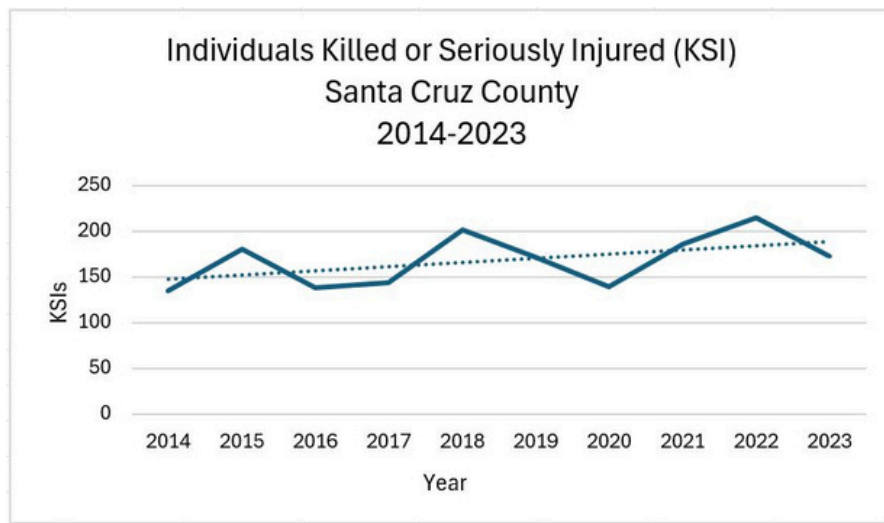
The OTS crash rankings are only indicators of potential problems—there are many factors that may either understate or overstate a county ranking that must be evaluated based on local circumstances. **A factor for consideration** for Santa Cruz County is the large number of people who bike and walk in our community. According to the American Community Survey’s most recent data, roughly 1% of commuters bike and 2% walk in California; whereas, about 2% of commuters bike and 5% walk in Santa Cruz County. Since these census data only record work commute mode of travel, the 7% of people who bike and walk is likely an undercount.²

[Learn more about and view the OTS Crash Rankings](#)

Santa Cruz County Crashes



From 2014–2023, there were a total of 11,637 reported crashes involving motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. Of those, 1,497 were killed or serious injury (KSI) crashes, resulting in **224 fatalities** and **1,456 serious injuries**.* This is an average of 22 fatalities and 146 serious injuries each year. The **dotted trend line** in the graph below indicates an overall increase in KSIs, with the most occurring in 2018 (201 KSIs) and 2022 (214 KSIs).^{2,7}



Santa Cruz County KSIs 2014–2023

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
KSI count	135	180	138	144	201	171	139	186	214	172

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Killed only count	21	20	21	19	22	19	19	30	29	24

The top primary collision factor violations** for KSI crashes from 2014–2023:

- Driving or bicycling under the influence of alcohol or drugs (21%)
- Unsafe speed (20%)
- Improper Turning (20%)
- Right of Way Violations (9%)

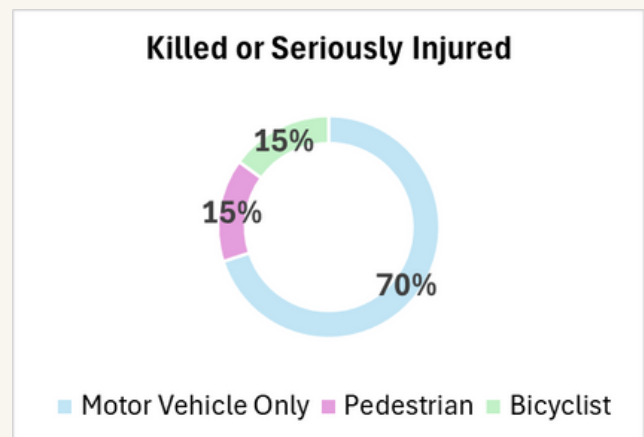
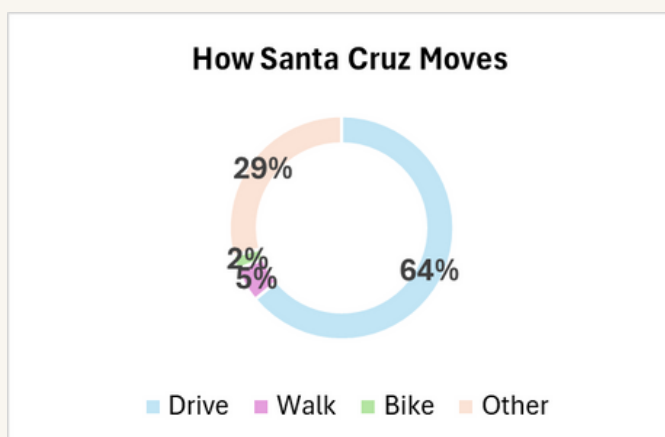
* CHP defines a “suspected serious injury” as an injury resulting in severe lacerations, broken bones, crush injuries, unconsciousness at the scene, paralysis, and any other injury resulting in possible severe internal injury or significant blood loss.⁶

**The primary collision factor violations refer to the specific action or condition that an officer believes was the primary cause of the crash, although crashes may have multiple causes.⁶

Bicycle and Pedestrian Crashes in Santa Cruz County

Individuals who bike or walk in our community are **disproportionately impacted** by traffic crashes, which is why the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians is the primary focus of CTSC. Bicyclists and pedestrians experience 30% of the total reported fatalities and severe injuries despite representing 7% of the overall commuting population.^{2,3} All road users have the right to be safe using the transportation network we all depend on every day—whether driving, biking, walking, or using public transit.

Santa Cruz County: Travel Mode vs. Traffic Fatalities and Serious Injuries



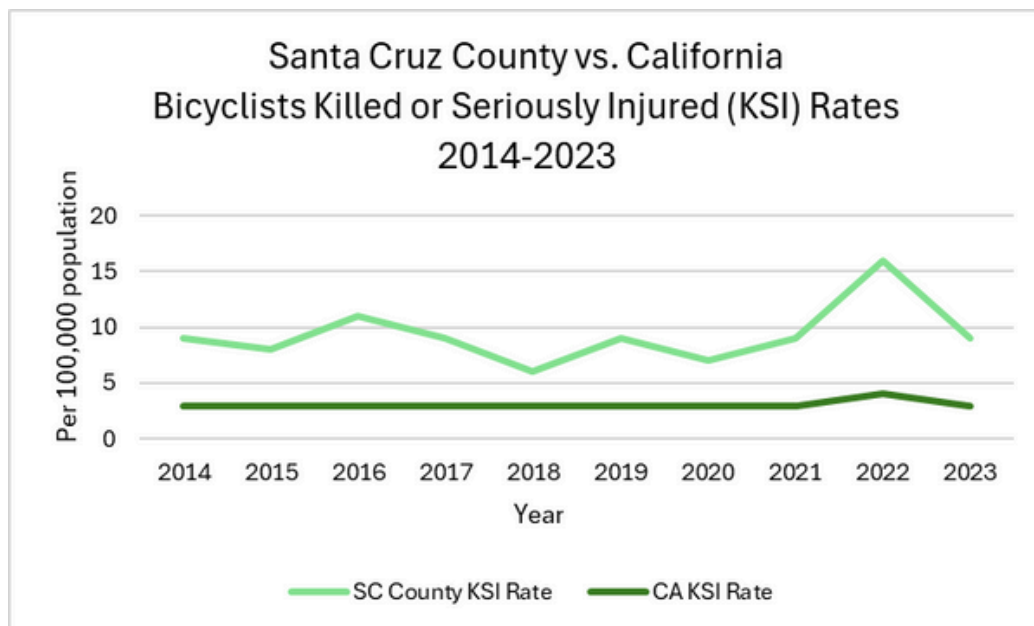
"It's critical to build new infrastructure as well as redesign our streets to be inclusive of all modes, including bicycling and walking. Increases in active transportation improve physical and mental health, protect the environment, and promote social engagement and a thriving local economy. It's about having a vibrant, livable community."

—Tawn Kennedy
Community Bike Team Program Manager,
Ecology Action



Bicycle Crashes

A total of **12 bicyclists were killed** and **242 seriously injured** in reported collisions from 2014-2023. The average Santa Cruz County bicyclist KSI crash rate was 3 times higher than the state rate as shown in the graph below. The greatest difference in rate between Santa Cruz County and California occurred in 2022, when the KSI crash rate was 16 per 100,000 population compared to 4 per 100,000 population, respectively.^{2,7}



Bicyclist KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

SCC vs. CA	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
SCC KSI count	23	23	29	26	16	25	18	24	44	26
SCC Rate	9	8	11	9	6	9	7	9	16	9
CA KSI count	1,088	1,147	1,113	1,141	1,241	1,197	1,095	1,176	1,445	1,337
CA KSI Rate	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3

SCC Bicyclists Killed

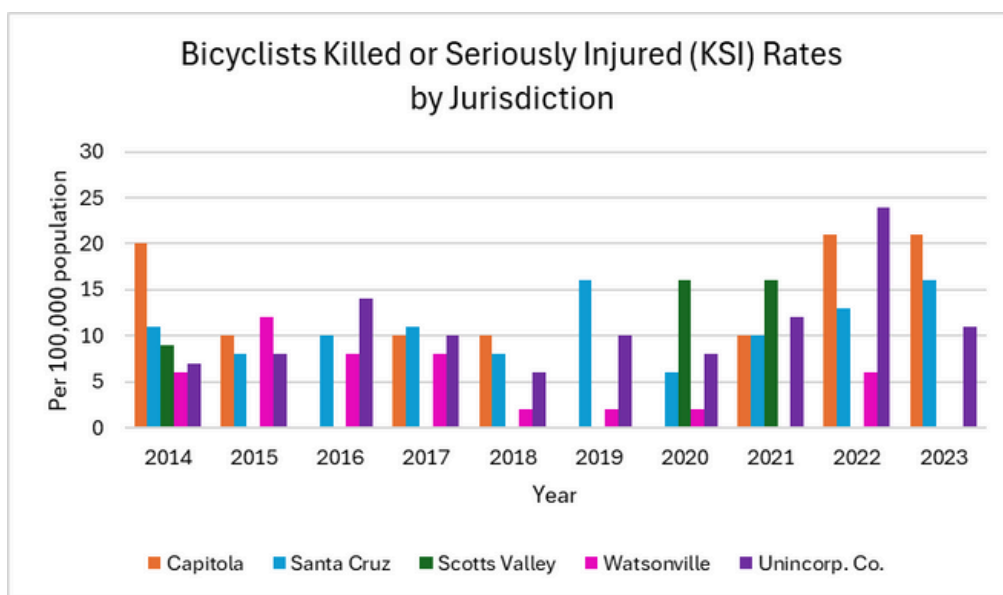
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
killed only count	2	0	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	0

In examining bicyclist KSI rates by jurisdiction, the City of Santa Cruz, Unincorporated Santa Cruz County, and the City of Capitola experienced overall higher rates per 100,000 population compared to the Cities of Scotts Valley and Watsonville. The Unincorporated County had the highest rate in 2022 with a 24 KSI bicyclist crash rate (31 KSIs). The City of Capitola had very high rates for 2022 and 2023 with 21 KSI bicyclist crash rates (2 KSIs) in both years.^{2,7}

The total bicyclist KSI count per jurisdiction from 2014–2023 is as follows: Capitola (10), Santa Cruz (68), Scotts Valley (5), Watsonville (23), and Unincorporated County (146).

No reported bicyclist deaths occurred in Capitola or Scotts Valley. There were 3 reported bicyclist deaths in Santa Cruz, 4 in Watsonville, and 7 in the Unincorporated County.

Please note: This is for general information and not for the purpose of drawing comparisons between jurisdictions.



Bicyclist KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

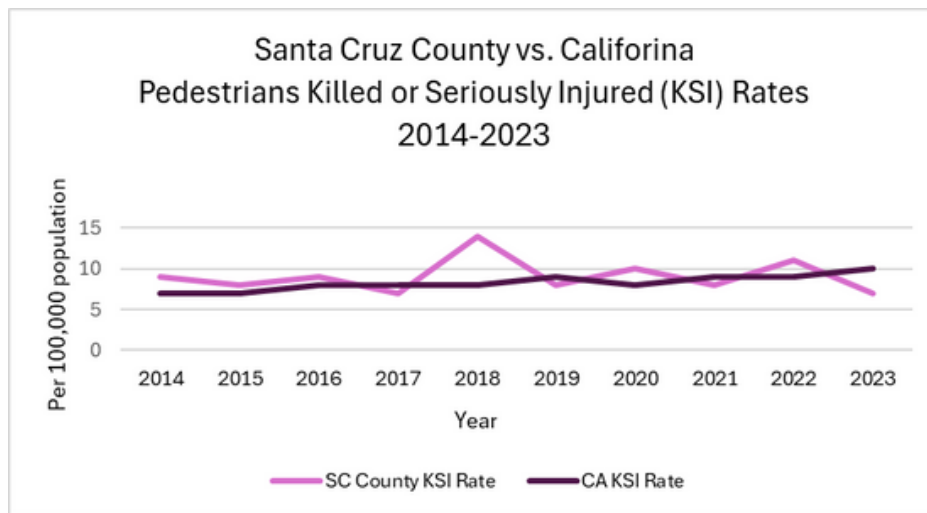
Jurisdiction	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Capitola KSI count	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	2
Rate	20	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	21	21
Santa Cruz KSI count	7	5	6	7	5	10	4	6	8	10
Rate	11	8	10	11	8	16	6	10	13	16
Scotts Valley KSI count	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Rate	9	0	0	0	0	0	16	16	0	0
Watsonville KSI count	3	6	4	4	1	1	1	0	3	0
Rate	6	12	8	8	2	2	2	0	6	0
Unincorp. KSI count	10	11	19	14	8	13	11	15	31	14
Rate	7	8	14	10	6	10	8	12	24	11

	Capitola	Santa Cruz	Scotts Valley	Watsonville	Unincorp.
Bicyclists killed only count by jurisdiction 2014–2023	0	3	0	4	7



Pedestrian Crashes

A total of **65 pedestrians were killed** and **188 seriously injured** in reported collisions from 2014–2023. When comparing pedestrian KSI rates between our county and the state as shown in the graph below, we had higher rates for most years. The greatest difference in rate occurred in 2018, when the KSI crash rate was 14 per 100,000 population compared to 8 per 100,000 population, respectively.^{2,7}



Pedestrian KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

SCC vs. CA	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
SCC KSI count	24	21	25	19	39	23	27	23	33	19
SCC Rate	9	8	9	7	14	8	10	8	11	7
CA KSI count	2,526	2,665	3,034	3,159	3,332	3,501	3,096	3,620	3,716	3,728
CA KSI Rate	7	7	8	8	8	9	8	9	9	10

SCC Pedestrians Killed

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
killed only count	6	3	7	6	12	5	8	4	9	5

"Santa Cruz, wake up! 65 pedestrians killed and 188 seriously injured over a 10-year period is unacceptable. These numbers rival murder rates, yet we seem to feel less urgency about stopping this violence.

We must get more serious about traffic safety in Santa Cruz County. We have the power to take steps to prevent these deaths and injuries."

—Debbie Bulger
pedestrian advocate

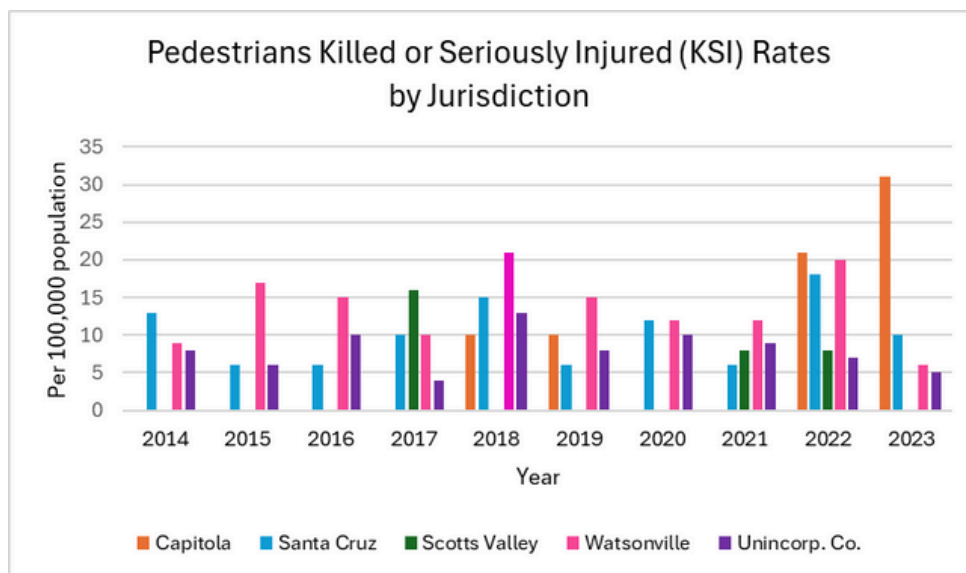


In examining pedestrian KSI rates by jurisdiction, the City of Watsonville experienced the highest overall rates per 100,000 population compared to all other jurisdictions; whereas, the City of Scotts Valley experienced the lowest rates. The City of Capitola had comparatively high rates in 2022 with a 21 KSI pedestrian crash rate (2 KSIs) and in 2023 with a 31 KSI pedestrian crash rate (3 KSIs).^{2,7}

The total pedestrian KSI count per jurisdiction is as follows: Capitola (7), Santa Cruz (64), Scotts Valley (4), Watsonville (71), and Unincorporated County (106).

No reported pedestrian deaths occurred in Scotts Valley. There were 3 reported pedestrian deaths in Capitola, 14 in Santa Cruz, 20 in Watsonville, and 28 in the Unincorporated County.

Please note: This is for general information and not for the purpose of drawing comparisons between jurisdictions.



Pedestrian KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

Jurisdiction	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Capitola KSIs count	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	3
Rate	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	0	21	31
Santa Cruz KSI count	8	4	4	6	9	4	8	4	11	6
Rate	13	6	6	10	15	6	12	6	18	10
Scotts Valley KSI count	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Rate	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	8	8	0
Watsonville KSI count	5	9	8	5	11	8	6	6	10	3
Rate	9	17	15	10	21	15	12	12	20	6
Unincorp. KSI count	11	8	13	5	18	10	13	12	9	7
Rate	8	6	10	4	13	8	10	9	7	5

	Capitola	Santa Cruz	Scotts Valley	Watsonville	Unincorp.
Pedestrians killed only count by jurisdiction 2014-2023	3	14	0	20	28

Conclusion

Serious traffic collisions are a significant public health issue in Santa Cruz County. A total of 224 people were killed and 1,456 seriously injured in reported collisions from 2014–2023. Furthermore, vulnerable road users, including bicyclists and pedestrians, are disproportionately impacted. 77 bicyclists and pedestrians were killed and 430 seriously injured. Prioritization of traffic safety and emphasis on the Safe System Approach is needed to ensure safer travel for all and particularly for individuals engaging in active transportation.

CTSC has been focused on Vision Zero efforts since 2016, and made great strides in supporting Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and Unincorporated Santa Cruz County, with adopting Vision Zero and securing federal Safe Streets & Roads for All (SS4A) funding to develop Vision Zero Action Plans. CTSC also formed the Watsonville Vision Zero Task Force (WVZTF) to address the unique strengths and needs in Watsonville.

The Coalition urges community members to support traffic safety efforts and help stop these preventable tragedies.

Here are some ways to get involved in traffic safety:

- Engage with local and state elected officials to voice your concerns and advocate for street design and policy changes.
- Attend CTSC or WVZTF meetings.
- Participate in CTSC traffic calming programs, including drive slowly trash can stickers and pace car stickers.
- Participate in the county's annual World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims in November.
- Learn about bicycle safety by attending CTSC's Bicycle Traffic School.

[Learn more about how to get involved](#)

Funding for this project was provided by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission.

Appendix: The Safe System Approach

Unlike prior traffic safety approaches that prioritize human behavior and place most of the blame on the individuals involved in a crash, the Safe System Approach works by building and reinforcing multiple layers of protection to prevent crashes from happening and minimizing harm to individuals when crashes occur.

The Objectives of a Safe System Approach:

Safer People: Encourage safe, responsible behavior by road users and create conditions that prioritize their ability to reach their destination unharmed.

Safer Roads: Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes and reduce the chances of severe injury and death to facilitate safe travel by the most vulnerable road users.

Safer Vehicles: Expand the availability of vehicle systems and features that help to prevent crashes and minimize the impact of crashes on both occupants and non-occupants.

Safer Speeds: Promote safer speeds in all roadway environments through a combination of roadway design, speed-limit setting, education, and enforcement.

Post-Crash Care: Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care. Enhance trauma support to crash victims and generate greater awareness of crashes and the impact they have on communities.

[Learn more about the Safe System Approach](#)



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