

# Easter road death stats under scrutiny

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12 Apr 2021

Transport minister Fikile Mbalula announced on 8 April that a total of 235 fatalities occurred across the country's provinces during the Easter period as a result of 189 crashes.



As the 2020 Easter period was nullified by the Covid-19 hard lockdown, 2019 figures are therefore more reflective of typical fatalities over this deadly period. As such, Mbalula said that in 2019, 193 crashes resulted in 260 fatalities, which would indicate a crash reduction of 2.1% and a fatality reduction of 9.6%.

However, the numbers don't add up as highlighted by the Automobile Association (AA), "Published numbers from the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) – which reflect official data – show that during the 2019 Easter period, 228 people died on South African roads. Should this be the case, then this year's preliminary number of 235 fatalities over the Easter period would be an increase, not a decrease. However, Minister Mbalula yesterday noted that 260 people died over the Easter period in 2019, which would indicate a decrease. These numbers do not reconcile with each other, rendering commentary on them redundant," said the AA.

It must be noted too that 260 fatalities in 2019 are nowhere to be found in official government documentation and the AA warns that any number provided now for the deaths over Easter 2021 is preliminary and comparing it to any final number from previous years is statistically irrelevant and premature.

## Data accuracy is critical

"We have a situation where the minister of transport says the government is making headway in achieving road safety goals but his assessment is based on questionable data. No valuable conclusions can be drawn from these numbers because of the difference and unreliability of the statistics," noted the AA.



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Furthermore, the AA also notes the importance of data accuracy in the fight against road fatalities, effective statistics are vital to ensuring proper allocation of resources and in determining the effectiveness of government's road safety awareness campaigns, something which cannot be done with the current numbers. We would suggest these numbers, and the reporting mechanisms used to record and calculate them, be reviewed as a matter of urgency

## **Death rate still too high**

Despite discrepancies in the data, the fact remains that far too many people's lives are being claimed on South Africa's roads.

Based on the data provided, pedestrian fatalities remain a problem with fatalities increasing from 30% to 35% compared to 2019.

"While we are not able to place reliance on the numbers presented, one death is one death too many. We also cannot be perpetuating a message that continually blames drivers for the high fatality rates. We know that human error causes crashes but this means that all involved must look for ways to build safe systems that acknowledge this factor and make allowances for it," said the AA.

Furthermore, the AA believes that road safety intervention by traffic law enforcement should be a daily occurrence.

"Road safety cannot be seasonal or event-driven, it has to be a continuous programme. Unless we realise this, and the importance of road safety to our society and economy, we will not solve the carnage on our roads, and we will also never meet the UN road safety targets for 2030."

*This article was originally published on [Cars.co.za](https://www.cars.co.za).*

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