



COMMUNITY TRAFFIC SAFETY COALITION ANNUAL CRASH REPORT 2016–2025



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 2016–2025 Crash Report



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Key Findings

Santa Cruz County (2016–2025)

- In 2024, road injury was the 3rd leading cause of premature death* in Santa Cruz County,** following drug overdose (1st) and alcohol-related (2nd).
- An average of 3 people were killed or seriously injured on Santa Cruz County roadways each week from 2016–2025.
- Approximately 58% of serious crashes occurred on local streets and roads, while 42% occurred on state highways.
- The top 3 causes of serious crashes were: alcohol or drugs (21%), unsafe speed (19%) and improper turning (19%).
- In 2022, bicyclists and pedestrians accounted for approximately 36% of reported fatalities and serious injuries despite representing roughly 11% of all trips in Santa Cruz County.
- According to the 2023 OTS Crash Rankings, the county ranked 1st statewide among all 58 California counties for bicyclists killed and injured and 3rd for bicyclists under the age of 15 killed and injured.
- The total number of people killed and seriously injured from 2016–2025, as well as the number of bicyclists and pedestrians, have all decreased from the highs of 2022.
- The county ranked 8th for victims killed and injured where an underage driver had been drinking alcohol.

*Premature death is measured in age-adjusted Years of Life Lost (YLL) per 100,000 population.

**Santa Cruz County includes all four incorporated cities as well as the unincorporated communities.

Summary

Traffic crashes are a serious public health issue in Santa Cruz County. In 2024, road injury was the third leading cause of premature death.¹ This report highlights local traffic safety trends to help inform efforts to prevent traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

The data presented in this report were collected from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and the California Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS). In 2023, the most recent year for which OTS data are available, Santa Cruz County ranked 19th among California's 58 counties for traffic crash victims killed and injured. The county also ranked among the highest for bicyclists killed and injured and for crashes involving an underage drinking driver.²

From 2016–2025, TIMS recorded 217 fatalities and 1,444 serious injuries on Santa Cruz County roadways—an average of approximately 3 people killed or seriously injured each week. After peaking at 214 KSIs in 2022, the number continued to decline from 2023 to 2025.³

People walking and bicycling continue to be disproportionately affected. Although they accounted for only about 11% of all trips in 2022, they represented approximately 36% of people killed or seriously injured in reported traffic crashes that year.^{3,5}

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) supports Vision Zero and the Safe System Approach, recognizing that traffic deaths and serious injuries are preventable. Community members can help by driving safely, supporting proven roadway improvements, participating in countywide traffic safety campaigns, and becoming involved with CTSC or the Watsonville Vision Zero Task Force (WVZTF).

Introduction & Purpose

Traffic crashes are a significant public health issue in Santa Cruz County, where road injuries are the third leading cause of premature death. To help address this challenge, the Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) of Santa Cruz County developed this annual county-wide crash report to highlight local traffic safety issues and trends. The findings will help inform the implementation and evaluation of local efforts to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries, including the newly released [Santa Cruz County Safety Action Plan](#).

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 who walk, bike, and roll. 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.

[Learn about Vision Zero](#)

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



Methods

This report presents the most recent available statewide Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) Crash Rankings (2023). 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 2016–2025 based on data collected from the California Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS). TIMS obtains its crash data from SWITRS. The TIMS data from 2016–2023 are final. The 2024 and 2025 data are considered provisional, meaning they may slightly undercount crashes; provisional SWITRS datasets are typically 95–99% complete.

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.



[Learn 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. The rankings are based on a variety of factors, including crash counts, population size, and total vehicle miles traveled. According to the latest 2023 rankings, Santa Cruz County **ranked 19th** highest among all 58 California counties for total victims killed and injured in traffic collisions. This is an improvement from 2022 when the county **ranked 11th** highest. **Higher rankings indicate greater crash burdens relative to other California counties.**

2023 Statewide OTS CRASH RANKINGS

Santa Cruz County **ranked among the 10 highest counties** for the crash categories in the below two tables.

Santa Cruz County consistently ranks high for bicyclists killed and injured in roadway collisions. In 2023, our county ranked 1st for bicyclists and 3rd for bicyclists under the age of 15.

Victims Killed and Injured	2023 SCC Crash Ranking
Bicyclists	1st
Bicyclists (under age 15)	3rd

Santa Cruz County also consistently ranks high for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists killed and injured where an underage driver had been drinking alcohol. In 2023, our county ranked 8th in this category.

Victims Killed and Injured	2023 SCC Crash Ranking
Had Been Drinking Driver (under 21)	8th

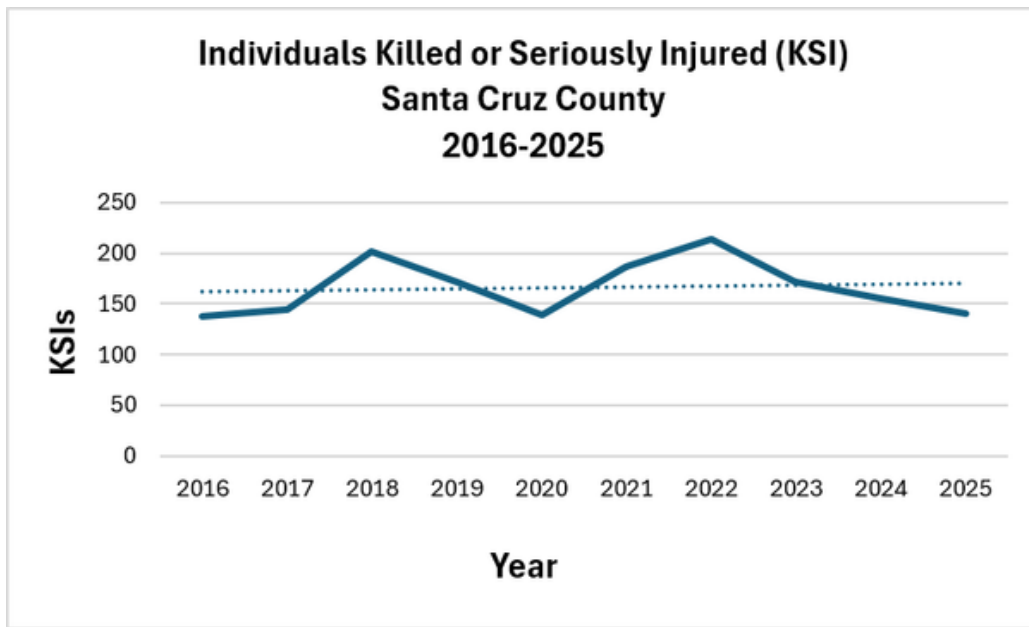
[View the OTS Crash Rankings](#)

*OTS crash rankings are only indicators of potential problems—there are other factors that may either understate or overstate a county ranking.

Santa Cruz County Crashes



From 2016–2025, there were 11,217 reported crashes involving motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians in Santa Cruz County. Of these, 1,488 were killed or serious injury* (KSI) crashes, resulting in 1,661 fatalities and serious injuries—an average of approximately 3 people killed or seriously injured every week.⁶ Approximately 58% of KSI crashes occurred on local streets and roads, while 42% occurred on state highways. State highways include the portions that are in cities, such as Mission Street in Santa Cruz and Main and East Lake in Watsonville. As shown by the dotted trend line below, KSIs increased slightly overall during the 10-year period. After peaking in 2022 (214), KSIs declined over the next three years.³



Santa Cruz County KSIs 2016–2025

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
KSI count	138	144	201	171	139	186	214	172	155	141

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Fatality count	21	19	22	19	19	30	29	24	17	17

*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



Top Causes of Crashes in Santa Cruz County

Below are the primary collision factor violations* for **KSI crashes** from 2016–2025. Together, alcohol or drug impairment, unsafe speed, improper turning, and vehicle right-of-way violations accounted for 69% of all KSI crashes.³

21%

Driving or bicycling under the influence of alcohol or drugs



19%

Unsafe speed



19%

Improper Turning



10%

Vehicle Right of Way

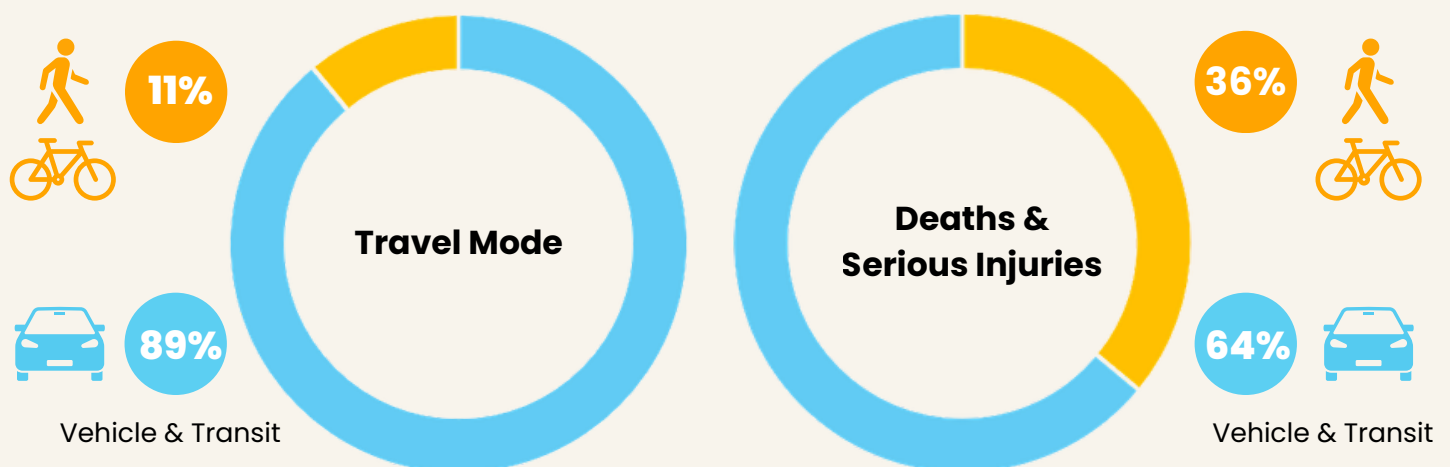


*The primary collision factor violations refer to the specific action or condition that an officer believes was the primary cause of the crash, although crashes may have multiple causes.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Crashes in Santa Cruz County

People who bike or walk in Santa Cruz County experience a **disproportionate** share of traffic fatalities and serious injuries, making their safety a primary focus of CTSC. In 2022, bicyclists and pedestrians experienced approximately 36% of the total reported fatalities and serious injuries despite representing roughly 11% of all trips in Santa Cruz County.^{3,5} 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.

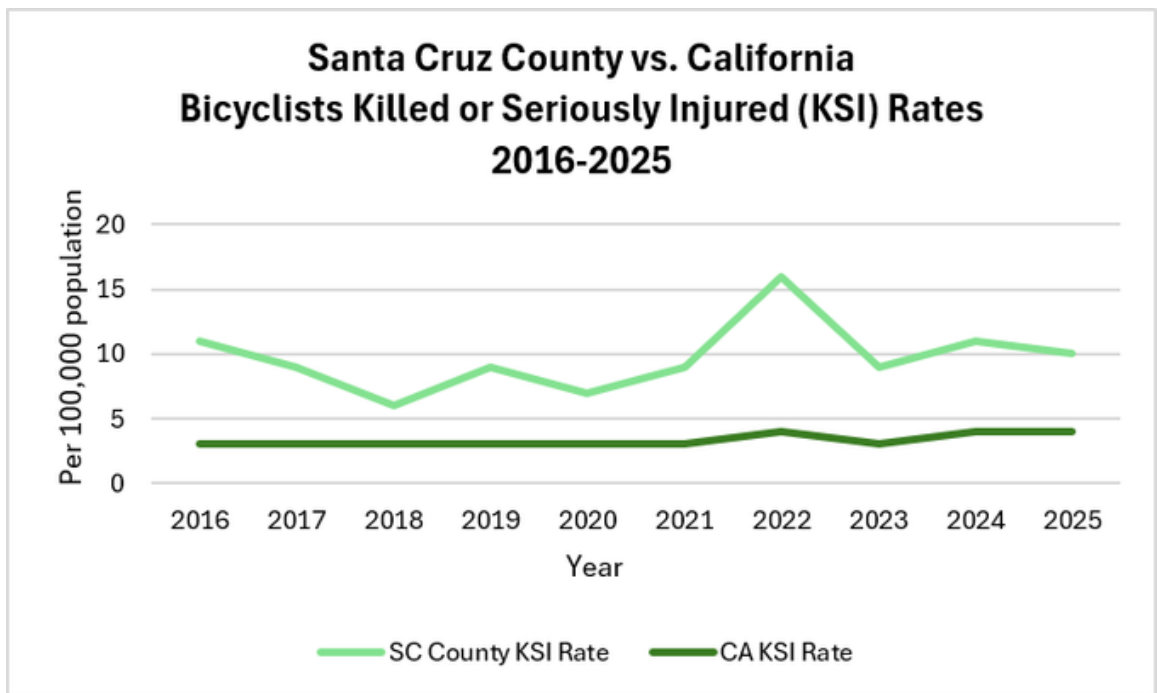
Travel Mode vs. Traffic Deaths and Serious Injuries





Bicycle Crashes

A total of 14 bicyclists were killed and 249 seriously injured in reported collisions from 2016–2025. Over the 10-year study period, Santa Cruz County’s bicyclist KSI crash rate averaged approximately 3 times the statewide rate. After peaking in 2022 (16 per 100,000 population), the county rate declined significantly in 2023 (9 per 100,000) and remained relatively stable through 2025.^{3,4}



Bicyclist KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

SCC vs. CA	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SCC KSI count	29	26	16	25	18	24	44	26	29	26
SCC Rate	11	9	6	9	7	9	16	9	11	10
CA KSI count	1,113	1,141	1,241	1,197	1,095	1,176	1,445	1,337	1,475	1,547
CA KSI Rate	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4

SCC Bicyclist Fatalities

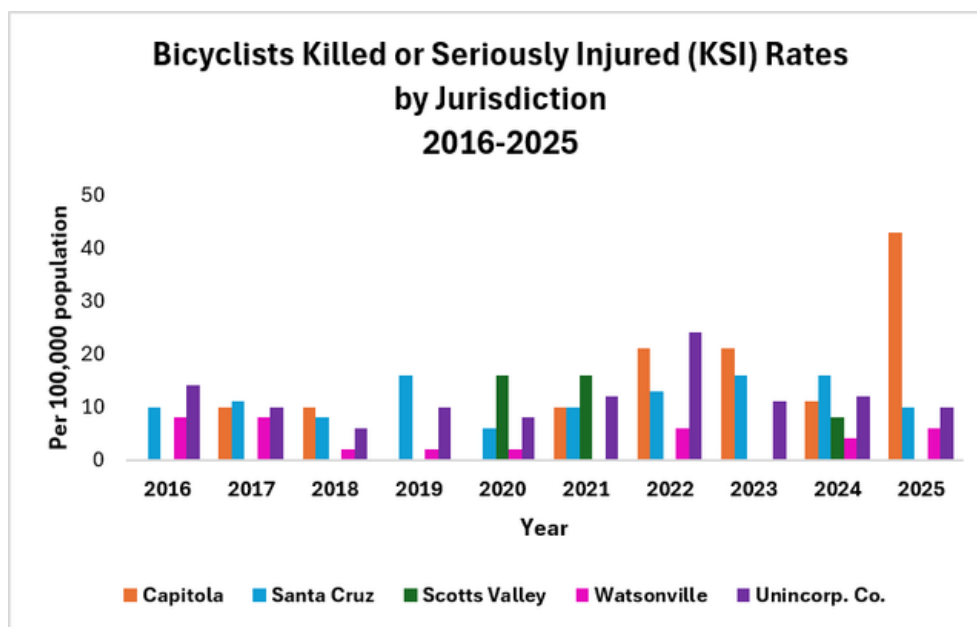
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Fatality count	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	2	2

Examination of bicyclist KSI rates by jurisdiction from 2016 to 2025 reveals that the unincorporated county and the City of Santa Cruz generally experienced the highest rates. Capitola showed the most substantial year-to-year fluctuations due to its smaller population, with a very high rate in 2025, while Scotts Valley and Watsonville generally reported lower rates.

The total bicyclist KSI count per jurisdiction from 2016–2025 is: Capitola (12), Santa Cruz (74), Scotts Valley (5), Watsonville (19), and the unincorporated county (153).

No reported bicyclist deaths occurred in Capitola or Scotts Valley. There were 2 reported bicyclist deaths in Santa Cruz, 5 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.



Pedestrian KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

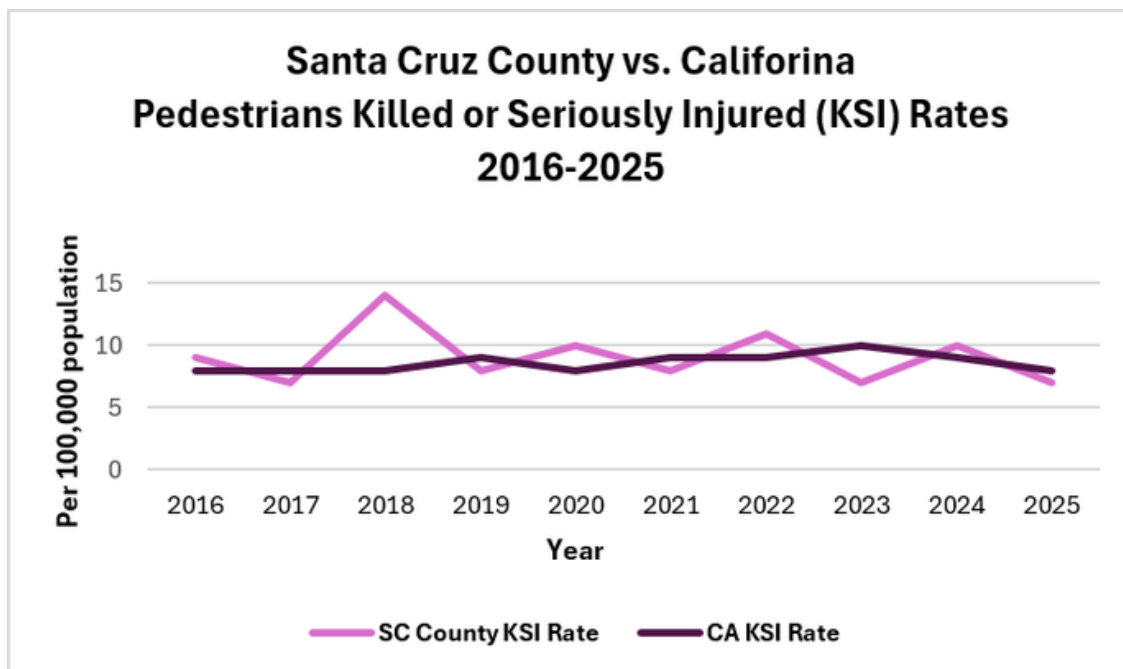
Jurisdiction	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Capitola KSIs count	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	4
Rate	0	10	10	0	0	10	21	21	11	43
Santa Cruz KSI count	6	7	5	10	4	6	8	10	10	6
Rate	10	11	8	16	6	10	13	16	16	10
Scotts Valley KSI count	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0
Rate	0	0	0	0	16	16	0	0	8	0
Watsonville KSI count	4	4	1	1	1	0	3	0	2	3
Rate	8	8	2	2	2	0	6	0	4	6
Unincorp. KSI count	19	14	8	13	11	15	31	14	15	13
Rate	14	10	6	10	8	12	24	11	12	10

	Capitola	Santa Cruz	Scotts Valley	Watsonville	Unincorp.
Pedestrian fatality count by jurisdiction 2016–2025	0	2	0	5	7



Pedestrian Crashes

A total of 66 pedestrians were killed and 185 seriously injured in reported collisions from 2016–2025. Santa Cruz County pedestrian KSI rates fluctuated, with more than half of the years above the statewide rate. In recent years, the county's rate reached 11 per 100,000 residents in 2022, dropped to a decade low of 7 in 2023, then increased to 10 in 2024, and dropped to 7 again in 2025.^{3,4}



Pedestrian KSI Rates per 100,000 Population

SCC vs. CA	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SCC KSI count	25	19	39	23	27	23	33	19	26	17
SCC Rate	9	7	14	8	10	8	11	7	10	7
CA KSI count	3,034	3,159	3,332	3,501	3,096	3,620	3,716	3,728	3,721	3,265
CA KSI Rate	8	8	8	9	8	9	9	10	9	8

SCC Pedestrians Killed

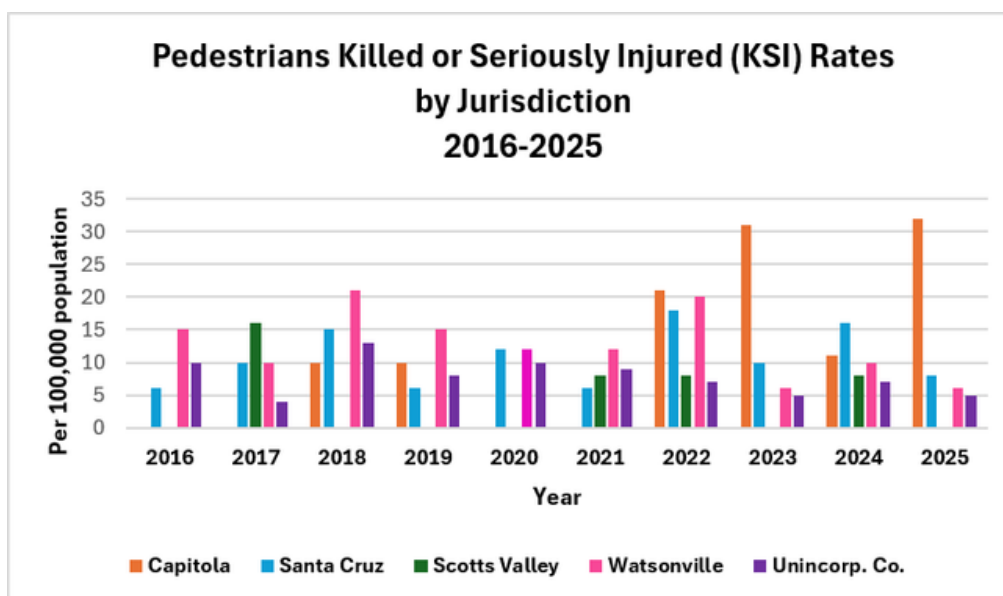
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Fatality count	7	6	12	5	8	4	9	5	6	4

The City of Watsonville generally experienced the highest pedestrian KSI rates during the time frame. Pedestrian KSI rates showed the greatest variability in the smaller jurisdictions (Capitola and Scotts Valley) where a single serious or fatal crash can significantly influence annual rates.

The total pedestrian KSI count per jurisdiction from 2016-2025 is: Capitola (11), Santa Cruz (68), Scotts Valley (5), Watsonville (65), and the unincorporated county (102).

No reported pedestrian deaths occurred in Scotts Valley. There were 3 reported deaths in Capitola, 15 in Santa Cruz, 21 in Watsonville, and 30 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	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Capitola KSIs count	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	3	1	3
Rate	0	0	10	10	0	0	21	31	11	32
Santa Cruz KSI count	4	6	9	4	8	4	11	6	10	5
Rate	6	10	15	6	12	6	18	10	16	8
Scotts Valley KSI count	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Rate	0	16	0	0	0	8	8	0	8	0
Watsonville KSI count	8	5	11	8	6	6	10	3	5	3
Rate	15	10	21	15	12	12	20	6	10	6
Unincorp. KSI count	13	5	18	10	13	12	9	7	9	6
Rate	10	4	13	8	10	9	7	5	7	5

	Capitola	Santa Cruz	Scotts Valley	Watsonville	Unincorp.
Pedestrian fatality count by jurisdiction 2016-2025	3	13	0	20	30

Conclusion

Serious traffic collisions are a major public health issue in Santa Cruz County. A total of 217 people were killed and 1,444 seriously injured in reported collisions from 2016–2025. Although the overall trend in reported KSIs increased slightly during the 10-year period, KSIs have declined since reaching a high of 214 in 2022.

CTSC has helped Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and the unincorporated county adopt Vision Zero and secure federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) funding to develop Vision Zero Action Plans. Watsonville has been implementing its Vision Zero Action Plan since 2021. In May 2026, Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and the unincorporated county released the [Santa Cruz County Safety Action Plan](#), which includes a Vision Zero Action Plan for the unincorporated county and Scotts Valley, as well as an updated plan for Watsonville.

The Coalition urges community members to support traffic safety efforts and help stop these preventable tragedies. Working together, we can build a transportation system where everyone can travel safely, regardless of how they choose to get around.

Here are some ways to help improve traffic safety:

- Drive the speed limit, follow traffic laws, and do not drive distracted.
- Participate in CTSC or WVZTF meetings.
- Participate in the county’s annual campaigns, such as Week Without Driving which raises awareness of challenges and barriers faced by those who walk, bike, and roll.
- Learn about bicycle safety by attending CTSC’s Bicycle Traffic School.

[Learn more about CTSC](#)

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 about the Safe System Approach](#)



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