



Q&A
with

Holly Kostrzewski

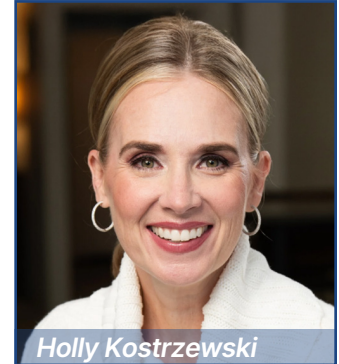
*International Speaker,
Rural and Tribal Traffic Safety Specialist*

Q: What is “frontier rural,” and why does it matter?

A: Frontier rural refers to areas with fewer than seven people per square mile. I believe if we can prevent crashes and save lives in frontier rural areas, we can solve roadway safety everywhere. These environments are the most challenging, so success there means success anywhere.

Q: Why is rural safety so personal to you?

A: I grew up on a frontier rural farm in northwestern Minnesota and was in a serious crash at 18. That experience changed my life and showed me the physical, emotional, and financial toll of crashes. I didn't choose this career, my career chose me. I've dedicated my life to preventing others from going through what my family did.



Holly Kostrzewski

Q: What are the biggest challenges in frontier rural road safety?

A: One of the biggest challenges is delayed emergency response. You first have to be found after a crash, which can take hours. Many responders are volunteers, and resources are limited. Roads are often narrow, unlit, and lack safety features, and there's limited law enforcement presence. All of this increases both crash risk and severity of outcomes.

Q: How do you explain the Safe System Approach in simple terms?

A: To me, the Safe System Approach reflects what we've always been doing, it just puts everything together. The key idea is accepting that people make mistakes and designing systems that prevent those mistakes from leading to death or serious injury. It also requires community involvement, especially in rural areas where culture and behavior play a major role.

Q: How can rural communities build effective road safety coalitions?

A: Start with your data to understand the problem, then bring the right people to the table—engineering, law enforcement, EMS, and education. You need a strong facilitator and must recognize everyone's contributions. When people feel valued and see success, they stay engaged. In rural areas, small groups of committed people can drive meaningful change.

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