

Transportation Officials Want to Ticket Those Who Don't Click It!

Seat belt use is reaching record levels in the United States, but a recent Associated Press report states that there are still plenty of holdouts who refuse to buckle up.

Statistically speaking, about 48 million people regularly shun their safety belts while hitting the road, a striking figure that the government would love to decrease several-fold. With that in mind, the U.S. highway safety agency is launching a campaign to promote seat belt use in advance of the peak summer driving season.

The "**Click It or Ticket**" campaign involves police checkpoints, patrols and advertisements to help enforce seat belt laws, and runs from May 22 through June 4. The latest report on seat belt use by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that men account for 65 percent of the people killed each year in passenger vehicles, a number that exceeds 31,000.

Some interesting findings in the report released Monday:

- Approximately 58 percent of those killed in car accidents while not wearing a seat belt crashed along rural roads.
- In crashes involving pickup trucks, about seven in 10 fatalities were people who did not buckle their safety belts.
- More than 60 percent of individuals between the ages of eight and 44 who were killed inside a vehicle were not buckled.

The agency said that lap and shoulder safety belts reduce risk of fatality for those riding in the front seat of passenger cars by 45 percent, and drop the risk of moderate-to-critical injuries by 50 percent. The risk of death for front-seat motorists in SUVs, pickup trucks and vans is reduced by 60 percent through safety belts, with moderate-to-critical injuries falling by a substantial 65 percent.

The public education campaign is using \$31 million in state and federal grants for national and state advertisements that seek to attract young drivers who watch sports such as NASCAR and major league baseball.

"Those who still don't buckle up need to know that police officers will be aggressively enforcing seat belt laws throughout the country and that violators will be ticketed," said Phil Haseltine, Executive Director of the National Safety Council's Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign.

For years, transportation officials have pushed for more states to enact laws allowing police to stop motorists solely for failing to wear a seat belt. Some state laws dictate that the seat belt violation alone is not enough to warrant a traffic stop. So-called "primary enforcement" safety belt laws have been enacted in 25 of the 50 U.S. states, along with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Most of the remaining states have secondary enforcement laws, which allow tickets for seat belt violations if motorists are pulled over for another offense. On the far end of the spectrum is New Hampshire, which has no seat belt law for adults.