

Seat Belt Safety

Seat belts save lives. Do you wear yours? Do you make sure that passengers riding in the vehicle with you are wearing theirs? States have made laws to require the use of seat belts, but unfortunately some people don't take these vehicle safety features serious. The benefits of using seat belts have been proven time and time again, just as the regrettable consequences have been realized time and time again by those who chose not to buckle up. Whether it's due to being in a hurry, feeling as if you're constricted when buckled up, preoccupied with other things and just simply not paying attention, or whatever the excuse. The fact is, it is just plain negligent on one's part to not make sure that all occupants in a vehicle are buckled up before the vehicle is ever taken out of park.

How important is safety belt usage? Here are some facts that you might want to know:

- Seat belt use decreases the risk of death by 45% for occupants riding in cars.
- Seat belt use decreases the risk of death by 60% for those riding in trucks or SUVs.
- Seat belts save 14,000 lives each year.
- 20% of Americans still fail to use seat belts.
- All federal employees are required by Executive Order 13043 to wear seat belts while traveling on public business as passengers or drivers.
- At least 28 federal workers were killed in on-the-job related traffic crashes in fiscal year 2003.
- Around 8,000 federal workers were injured in on-the-job related traffic crashes in fiscal year 2003.
- The U.S. Government has paid out nearly \$75 million in medical and compensation costs related to federal employee injuries and deaths from motor vehicle crashes over the past five years.

By just incorporating the use of seat belts every time we enter a vehicle, whether as a driver or passenger, we can all help to decrease these types of preventable injuries and deaths. The benefits of seat belt use needs to be communicated to everyone, young and old, so that buckling up will become as routine as opening the door to enter the vehicle and putting the key in the ignition. Remember, seat belts save lives, but that's only true if they're being used.

References:

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs. Data prepared by OWCP for OSHA.

U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Center for Statistics and Analysis, Safety Belt Use in 2003-Use Rates in the States and Territories.

U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Occupant Protection Use Survey, June 2003

Contributed by: Carl Baldwin, Safety & Loss Control Specialist, West Virginia Board of Risk and Insurance Management