

The Seat Belt is 45 Years Old But Some Still Resist Wearing One! This Year's Click It or Ticket Campaign is May 20 – June 2

After so many years of having seat belts standard in vehicles, it would seem that buckling your seat belt before driving off would be second nature. When President Johnson signed the legislation that became effective in 1968, seat belts became mandatory in all passenger vehicles. Texas passed their first seat belt law in 1985. Since then millions of lives have been saved and injuries prevented as a result of these laws. Fortunately, most motorists do buckle up, but for some groups there is still more work to be done. Pickup truck drivers and their passengers, teens and people who live in rural areas are still not convinced.

Crash data from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) show that there has been an 11% increase in traffic fatalities from 2011 to 2012. Wearing a seat belt is the single most important thing that drivers and passengers can do to help survive a crash. Yet in Texas in 2012, 45% of persons killed in crashes were reported as being unrestrained. Among pickup truck drivers killed in crashes 50% were unbuckled. Nearly half of teens killed in crashes are unrestrained. According to a recent study by Texas A&M Transportation Institute, in Texas only 78.4% of teens wear their seat belts. And, in rural Texas where most fatalities occur, seat belt use is also lower.

Pickup truck drivers and their passengers sometimes depend on their bigger pickup truck to protect them in a crash. Yet, pickup trucks are twice as likely to rollover than passenger cars and pickup crashes can be especially serious – even deadly – due to their tendency to roll over and for unbelted occupants to be thrown from the vehicle.

Teens are inexperienced drivers and subject to distractions in the vehicle. Seat belts are life-saving for these young drivers and their passengers, yet they are not consistently wearing them on every trip.

The Click It or Ticket campaign has been successful in bringing Texas's seat belt rate to 94% from only 76.1% when the campaign first started in 2002. It is estimated that the campaign can be credited with saving almost 3,700 lives and preventing more than 50,000 injuries in Texas.

This year the campaign is scheduled for May 20-June 2, which includes Memorial Day Weekend. During this time, extra law enforcement representatives will be on the roads enforcing the seat belt and child restraint laws in an effort to save lives.

The law in Texas requires seat belt use for all passengers – front and back. Children younger than eight years old, unless taller than 4'9", must be in a child restraint. Fines for seat belt violations can range from \$25 dollars to \$250 dollars. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension reminds motorists that buckling up can save you money and, more importantly, save your life!

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