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Missouri Seat Belt Use Up – But Still A Primary Problem

Jefferson City, MO – Seat belts save lives. A recent survey of Missouri motorists show that more Missourians are getting that message. However, a full 21 percent of the general public and 33 percent of teens don't wear their seat belts.

The number of people who buckle up rose slightly from last year's survey data, going up three percent from 76 to 79 percent of the general public and up just one percent among teenagers from 66 to 67 percent. In 2010, 392 people killed in traffic crashes were unbuckled.

"The survey numbers continue to be relatively flat," said Leanna Depue, chair of the Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety's executive committee. "The sad truth is a simple click can prevent the needless and tragic injury and death of so many people involved in traffic crashes."

Wearing a seat belt is your best defense in a crash because it provides protection from being ejected and keeps motorists from smashing into windshields, dashboards and other passengers.

"All the data and the experts agree that seat belts are life saving devices," said Depue. "But convincing all Missouri motorists is a difficult task. A primary seat belt law instead of the secondary one Missouri has would certainly save more lives each year."

At 79 percent use, Missouri is still 6 percent under the national average of 85 percent seat belt use. Thirty-two states have primary seat belt laws; Missouri is one of 17 states that has a secondary law. New Hampshire has neither a primary nor a secondary law. Nineteen municipalities and one county have adopted primary ordinances in Missouri.

Some vehicle types stand out when looking at seat belt use. Pickup truck drivers are among the worst with only 66 percent buckling up according to the 2011 observational survey. Of the 152 pickup drivers killed in 2010, 87.1 percent were unbuckled.

The annual survey involved more than 127,720 observations of drivers and passengers in 460 locations in both urban and rural counties. Missouri worked with The Missouri Safety Center to conduct the survey. From 2004 - 2010 the usage rate has fluctuated only slightly between 75 and 77 percent.

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MoDOT incorporated new strategies into this year's *Click It or Ticket Campaign*. They include using portable message boards to post messages about fatalities and seat belt citations; partnering with high schools and large employers to get them to adopt seat belt policies; and providing incentives to positively reinforce wearing a seat belt. *Click It or Ticket* is a national campaign designed to increase seat belt use and reduce highway fatalities. The campaign couples high-visibility enforcement with education.

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