Do You ALWAYS Wear Your Seat Belt?

**History of Seat Belts:** Where did the seat belt come from and what has been the effect of seat belt use in our country? The first U.S. patent for automobile seat belts was issued to Edward J. Claghorn of New York, New York on February 10, 1885. Claghorn was granted United States Patent #312,085 for a Safety-Belt for tourists, described in the patent as "designed to be applied to the person, and provided with hooks and other attachments for securing the person to a fixed object." Swedish inventor, Nils Bohlin invented the three-point seat belt (lap and shoulder) which is now a standard safety device in most cars. Nils Bohlin's lap-and-shoulder belt was introduced by Volvo in 1959. The first child car seats were invented in 1921, following the introduction of Henry Ford’s Model T, however, they were very different from today's car seat. The earliest versions were essentially sacks with drawstring attached to the back seat. In 1978, Tennessee became the first American State to require child safety seat use.

According to E How.com, a study conducted by the University of California/Berkeley Traffic Safety Center reports that seat belts first appeared in American cars in the early 1900s, and they were popular because they kept passengers from falling out during bumpy rides, not as a safety precaution against accidents. There weren't many cars on the roads at this time, so crashes weren't a big concern and most roads were not yet paved. Seat belts were later added to airplanes and then to racecars in the 1920s. In the 1930s, several U.S. physicians began adding lap belts to their own cars and urging manufacturers to do the same, according to Britain's Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. In 1950, American automaker Nash emerged with the first factory-installed seat belts in the Statesman and Ambassador models, which consisted of a single belt that stretched across your lap. When it came to auto manufacturers developing seat belts, Volvo led the pack. In 1956, Volvo introduced a two-point cross-chest diagonal belt. The same year, Ford and Chrysler offered lap belts as an option on some models. In 1962, U.S. carmakers required seat belt anchors to be standard in the front seat. Also in this year, a British magazine reported that seat belts reduced the risk of death or serious injury during an auto accident by 60 percent. In 1963, Volvo expanded its three-point safety belt as a standard on cars sold in the United States as well. By the following year, most U.S. manufacturers provided lap belts in the front seat.
More and more Americans bought cars every year, but until the 1960s, there was very little government regulation of the auto industry or highways. Carmakers believed that safety features would not sell cars, but would scare the public instead. Most auto advertising focused on comfort, style, and performance rather than safety. In 1965, 50,000 people were killed in car accidents (in 2011 there were 32,367 killed), but the government and the industry focused on drivers and roads as the cause, instead of the cars themselves, according to the Prevention Institute. In 1966, a small group of legislatures, consumer advocates and lawyers began pressuring the government and the auto industry to make cars safer, and they eventually listened.

The Highway Safety Act and the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act were passed in 1966. These were the most substantial pieces of legislature regarding auto industry standards ever passed, because they authorized the federal government to regulate vehicle and highway standards and created the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). These measures led to many improvements in auto design, including mandatory installation of seat belts. In 1970, the NHTSA reported that motor vehicle--related deaths had significantly decreased.

Requiring that manufacturers install seat belts in cars did not ensure that people used them, however. For the next 20 years, the auto industry and federal governments campaigned for seat belt laws to be passed in all 50 states. By 1989, 34 states had laws requiring drivers and passengers to buckle up. By 1995, every state except New Hampshire passed legislation mandating seat belt use. In 2002, 19 states had primary enforcement seat belt laws, which enable police officers to ticket a driver solely for lack of wearing a seat belt, which greatly increased belt usage in those states. The NHTSA reports that fatality rates of motor-vehicle accidents have dramatically reduced since the enactment of seat belt laws by state legislatures. According to the New Jersey Office of Highway, studies have consistently shown that the use of seat belts saves lives and reduces injuries during a crash. More than 2,000 unbuckled drivers and front seat passengers died on New Jersey roadways in the last 10 years, 700 of whom were thrown out of their vehicle.

New Jersey Law, 39:3-76.2f requires all passengers in a vehicle to use a safety belt and requires children under 80 pounds or 8 years of age to be secured in a child restraint seat. Each year, New Jersey has a Click it or Ticket Campaign (this year it is May 20-June 2, 2013) where over 400 police departments state-wide participate in strictly enforcing the seat belt laws. Thanks to this effort, as well as other educational efforts on seat belts, New Jersey has an 88.29% compliance rate with seat belt usage, slightly higher than the national average.

According to the National Safety Council there are still groups less likely to wear seat belts. They include teens, commercial drivers, male drivers in rural areas, pickup truck drivers, people driving at night and people who have been drinking. Seat belts are the single most effective traffic safety device for preventing death and injury, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Wearing a seat belt can reduce the risk of crash injuries by 50 percent. They save lives:

- Seat belts saved more than 75,000 lives from 2004 to 2008.
• 42% of passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2007 were unbelted. A 2009 NHTSA study estimates more than 1,600 lives could be saved and 22,000 injuries prevented if seat belt use was 90 percent in every state.

Nationwide, seat belt use is higher than ever. Yet seat belt use remains lowest among young drivers. NHTSA also reports that, in 2007:

• Seat belt use was lower among blacks than any other race.
• Seat belt use was higher among females than males.
• Seat belt use was lower among drivers who drove alone than drivers with passengers.

Since we are a community with a large young adult population, we need to remind ourselves of the safety advantages of the seat belt. Car crashes are called accidents because that is what they are. We can’t predict when they will happen or where they will happen, but if you drive, there’s a good chance you will be involved in one. Be ready at all times and wear your seat belt.

**TIP OF THE WEEK:**

![Buckle Up No Excuses](image)

We continue to ask for your assistance as safety is everyone’s business. So please report any safety or security concern to us at 609-652-4390 or dial 9-1-1 in an emergency.