

MEDIA RELEASE

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2021 MAY SEAT BELT CAMPAIGN: PRE-ENFORCEMENT NEWS RELEASE

UNBELTED TRAFFIC FATALITIES HIGHEST IN NEARLY A DECADE

Extra Seat Belt Patrols May 24-June 6

Owatonna, Minn. – Minnesota motorists are known for their high seat belt compliance rate, but a disturbing development is taking place on Minnesota roads. Between Jan. 1 and April 22, preliminary reports show 31 unbelted motorists died this year, the highest number of year-to-date unbelted traffic fatalities since 2012 (33).

This loss of life comes after a deadly 2020 when 112 unbelted motorists died on Minnesota roads compared to 73 in 2019. The 112 unbelted motorist deaths in 2020 were also the highest since 2012 (116).

To remind motorists about the importance of buckling up, the Owatonna Police Department will join law enforcement agencies statewide in extra seat belt patrols May 24 through June 6. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety (DPS-OTS) coordinates the campaign and the funding provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Most Minnesotans are making the life-saving decision to buckle up. According to the 2019 Minnesota Observational Seat Belt Survey, 93.4 percent of front seat occupants are wearing their seat belts. The rest are gambling with their lives and the lives of others in the vehicle by riding unbelted.

Bad decisions contribute to life-changing outcomes

- In 2020, 112 unbelted motorists lost their lives on Minnesota roads.
- Adults must take the time to correctly use child restraints, teach children the value of buckling up and model seat belt use. From 2016-2020:
 - 20 children (ages 0-7) were killed in motor vehicles.
 - Eight of the victims were properly secured, eight were not properly restrained, and restraint use was unknown in four fatalities.
 - Of the 87 children (ages 0-7) seriously injured in motor vehicles, 49 percent were known to be properly secured.

Good decisions are a lifesaver

- In 1987, 4,176 vehicle occupants suffered severe injuries in traffic crashes. That number dropped to 1,056 in 2020.
- 2020 saw the highest number of unbelted fatalities (13) of 15-19-year-olds since 2011 (20)
- 2020 saw the highest number of unbelted fatalities (31) of 25-39-year-olds since 2012 (36).
- In 2020, 79 percent of the unbelted deaths occurred in Greater Minnesota (outside the seven-county metro area).

The Law is for Safety

Minnesota law states that drivers and passengers in all seating positions must wear seat belts or be in the correct child restraint. Occupants must correctly wear seat belts low and snug across the hips, and they should never tuck straps under an arm or behind the back. If you are unbuckled, expect to be stopped.

Minnesota Child Car Seat Law Protects Young Lives

- In crashes from 2016-2020, of the 15,670 children ages 0-7 that were properly restrained, 88 percent were not injured while another 9 percent sustained only possible injuries.
- In Minnesota, all children must be in a child restraint until they are 4 feet 9 inches tall, or at least age 8, whichever comes first.
- Rear-facing seats - All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car seat until they have reached the height and weight limits allowed by the car seat manufacturer.
- Forward-facing seats with harness - Toddlers and preschoolers who have reached the height and weight limits of the rear-facing car seat should use a forward-facing seat with harness until they reach the weight limit of the harness allowed by the car seat manufacturer.
- Booster seats - School-age children who have reached the height and weight limits of the forward-facing seat can sit on a booster seat. It must be used with a lap and shoulder belt.
- Seat belts - Children 8 years old or have reached 4 feet 9 inches tall can buckle up with seat belts. Your child is ready for an adult seat belt when they can sit with their back against the vehicle seat, knees bent comfortably and completely over the vehicle seat edge without slouching, and feet touching the floor.

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