Fact Sheet

Seat Belt and Child Restraint Use needs your attention

There are two key elements to occupant protection – seat belt usage and child restraint usage.

Seat belts are highly effective for reducing the severity of traffic injuries. Over the past three decades, dramatic increases in seat belt use have been achieved through the enactment of mandatory use laws, law enforcement strategies, and public education campaigns.

Child safety seat use reduce the risk for deaths to infants (aged <1 year) by 71 percent; and by 54 percent for toddlers (aged 1-4 years). In Washington between 2010 and 2012, 26 child vehicle occupants age 12 and under died, and another 122 received serious injuries as a result of traffic crashes. The majority of these tragedies likely could have been avoided had these children been properly restrained according to Washington State law.

Seat Belt Usage

Why is seat belt use important?

An analysis of fatal crash records between 2014 - 2016 shows that about 75 percent of drivers or passengers who are not using seat belts are killed in the crash. Clearly, the chances of surviving a crash increase dramatically when using seat belts.

Seat belt usage – nearly 95 percent of Washingtonians routinely use seat belts

During the 2016 seat belt observation survey, 83,180 front seat vehicle occupants, consisting of 64,634 drivers and 18,546 passengers, were observed in order to record shoulder seat belt use. The statewide observed rate for all vehicles and occupants was 94.7 percent, with a 95 percent confidence interval of +/- 0.58 percent. Thus, the actual statewide seat belt use rate could have been as high as 95.3 percent or as low as 94.1 percent.
### Analysis of belt use by type of road

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF VEHICLE</th>
<th># OBSERVED</th>
<th>RATE</th>
<th>95% CL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passenger Cars</td>
<td>39,494</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>93.7% - 95.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickup Trucks</td>
<td>13,903</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
<td>90.4% - 93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Utility Vehicles</td>
<td>23,403</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
<td>95.4% - 97.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vans</td>
<td>6,380</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>92.8% - 98.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>83,180</strong></td>
<td><strong>94.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>94.1% - 95.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of belt use by type of road showed lower belt use on Non-Major roads (93.8 percent) than on Major roads (95.4 percent).

### Who are the seat belt non-users?

About five percent of Washingtonians do not use their seat belts consistently. According to an analysis of seat belt law violations, the most likely individuals to not use seat belts are:

- Older males who drive pickup trucks
- Younger American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) males (The largest disparity in traffic safety data is with AI/AN populations. They are over-represented in traffic safety fatality and serious injury statistics and have the lowest seat belt use rates).
- Younger Hispanic/Latino males.

### History of seat belt use in Washington State

Seat belt use has shown a fairly consistent upward trend from 1986 to 2016. Seat belt use rates more than doubled in the 10 years following implementation of the secondary enforcement law (from 36 percent in 1986 to 80 percent in 1995). The rates in Washington under the secondary law were among the highest reported by secondary-law states.

In 2002, changes implemented in laws, policies, and programs had a dramatic influence on seat belt use rates. These changes included the following:

- The primary enforcement law was enacted in June 2002.
• The Chief of the Washington State Patrol made seat belt enforcement one of the core missions of the agency.

• Washington State participated in the national Memorial Day “Click it or Ticket” program during May/June 2002.

Due to these changes, observed belt use increased from 82.6 percent in 2001 to 92.6 percent in 2002.

Washington has been able to maintain a high rate of seat belt use (93 to 98 percent) in the years since 2002 by continuing to support enhanced enforcement programs in conjunction with public education efforts. These programs include the following:

• Regular waves of Click it or Ticket mobilizations – two waves per year through 2009, and one per year from 2010 through 2016.
• Road signs that constantly remind the public that the seat belt law is enforced and that the fine is expensive (currently $136).
• High school-based seat belt education projects have been conducted in over 60 schools since 2007.

Child Safety Restraints

Child vehicular fatalities increasing in Washington

• Fatalities for child passengers in Washington increased 67 percent from 2014 to 2015.
• Nationally, vehicle crash-related deaths of children have been reduced by more than half from 1,489 in 1989 to 663 in 2015, mostly as a result of use of approved child passenger safety devices.

Parents need to determine the following in order to purchase the “best car seat”

• How the car seat fits the vehicle
• How the car seat fits the child
• Ease of use
• Whether the harness is easy to adjust
• Whether the car seat fits your budget
• Whether the car seat is easy to care for/clean

Parents often feel they can’t afford a child restraint
• There are now convertible car seats on the market that fit a newborn baby for around $50 at your local department store. Parents can find a booster seat for even less of an expense.

• Families using Apple Health/Medicaid may qualify for a free car seat.

• A local agency like Pregnancy Aid, West Side Baby, or East Side Baby Corner has a process of collecting used safe seats and redistributing to families in need.
General tips on car seat use:

- Get the right seat
- Register your seat right away
- Read the instructions of the child restraint and motor vehicle
- Install your car seat correctly
- Buckle your child in the car seat, every time

Target Zero

- Washington State has adopted Target Zero — a goal to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries on Washington's roadways to zero by the year 2030. Our goal is zero deaths and serious injuries, because every life counts.