



# Safety NETS

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Information to help keep your employees safe on the road

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MINNESOTA NETWORK OF EMPLOYERS FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

## Buckling Up: The Employer's Role

Minnesota's seat belt use rate has climbed to 80%, taking an impressive leap beyond the national rate of 75%. But the number of deaths on our roads through December 17 of this year is troubling, numbering 549 compared to 490 at the same time last year.

The single most effective step we can take to reduce these deaths (and thousands of injuries) is to buckle up on every trip. Law enforcement agencies in Minnesota are focusing on unbuckled motorists in a series of enforcement blitzes designed to motivate motorists to wear their seat belts. Minnesota NETS supports these lifesaving efforts and urges employers to take an active role in promoting seat belt use within their organizations.

Employers of all sizes and industry types have been successful in attaining high seat belt use rates by implementing corporate seat belt policies and incentives. Minnesota NETS encourages employers to commit to a corporate seat belt use rate of 100 percent. We can provide employers with seat belt policies and instructions for conducting on-site observational surveys to determine their seat belt use rate as well as programs, campaign messages and activities that motivate employees to wear their seat belts both on and off the job.

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death in the workplace and a leading cause of work-related disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). There is evidence that many employees do not wear seat belts on the job and recent research findings indicate that belt use among

those driving for work may be lower than among other vehicle operators.

Seat belt use is an inexpensive and effective way for employers to reduce occupational deaths and injuries. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that using seat belts reduces the risk of death among front seat occupants in passenger vehicles by about 45 percent; the risk reductions among occupants of pickup trucks are estimated to be 60 to 65 percent.

"Employees lose an estimated \$61 billion in wages and fringe benefits annually as a result of traffic crashes," said Kathryn Lusby-Treber, Executive Director of national NETS. "Employers pay more than \$31 billion in insurance costs because of these collisions."

NETS urges employers nationwide to "buckle up" their employees. Seat belts prevent about 11,900 fatalities and 325,000 injuries a year, saving \$50 billion in medical care, lost productivity and other injury-related costs. Not wearing seat belts results in 9,200 avoidable deaths and 143,000 needless injuries. The evidence is overwhelming that seat belts save lives and reduce the severity of injuries. Employers must make a commitment to increasing seat belt use among their employees.

For more information about Minnesota NETS and resources available to employers, contact Lisa Kons at 651-228-7330/800-444-9150; e-mail: [kons@mnsafetycouncil.org](mailto:kons@mnsafetycouncil.org).

# Arguments Against Buckling Up Just Don't Click

Using seat belts reduces the risk of death and serious injury by an average of 50%. In addition, since the first safety belt law took effect in Minnesota in the mid-80s we have seen a dramatic effect in reduction of injury severity.

A primary seat belt law is one of the most effective tools we can use to help more people buckle up on Minnesota roads. Minnesota law requires front seat passengers to buckle up (as well as children under age 12 anywhere in the vehicle). However, the driver has to commit another moving violation in order to be cited for a seat belt violation. Strengthening our law to allow law enforcement officers to pull people over for not buckling up seems like a no-brainer. But there are a number of stubborn arguments pulled out when this issue is under discussion, which on examination don't hold up well. We've summarized them below.

## 1) Personal Choice

"It's my own personal decision whether to buckle up or not—it doesn't affect anyone else."

Actually, that decision can have consequences for all of us:

- During a crash the bodies of unbuckled drivers or passengers become missiles that can seriously injure or kill another occupant of the vehicle.
- Friends and family of persons severely injured or killed in a crash pay a terrible emotional price for the decision not to buckle up (and often assume a financial burden as well).
- Crash victims who are not wearing seat belts have medical bills that are 50% higher than those victims who wore a belt. Society bears 85% of those costs through

increased insurance premiums, taxes and health care costs.

- Traffic crashes in 2001 cost Minnesota an estimated \$1.6 billion in lost wages and productivity, medical and administrative expenses, motor vehicle damage and employer costs.

## 2) Trapped by a Seat Belt?

"I don't wear a seat belt because I might get trapped in the car after a crash."

- Being thrown free from a vehicle is 25 times more likely to result in death than is staying in the vehicle (Network of Employers for Traffic Safety/NHTSA). Seat belts keep people from plunging through the windshield, being thrown out of the vehicle, scraping along the ground, and being crushed by the vehicle.
- Less than 1/2 of 1% of all injury-producing collisions involve fire or submersion. But, if a vehicle catches fire or submerges, wearing a seat belt can keep you from being knocked unconscious, and therefore able to escape.

## 3) Racial Profiling

"Law enforcement will use primary enforcement as an excuse to harass people of color."

African Americans who live in states with a primary seat belt law overwhelmingly favor the law—by more than a 3-to-1 margin. Less than one-half of one percent of African Americans reported race-related harassment problems as a result of their state's seat belt law. (1999 study sponsored by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and the Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign. See <http://www.nsc.org/news/nr101599.htm> for details.)



**Need help with your child's car seat?  
Call the Minnesota Safety Council at  
651-228-7321/800-444-9150, extension 321.**

