

Seat Belts: Your Single Most Effective Safety Step

A **seat belt**, sometimes called a **safety belt**, is a safety harness designed to secure the occupant of a vehicle against harmful movement that may result from a collision or a sudden stop. Seat belts are intended to reduce injuries by stopping the wearer from hitting hard interior elements of the vehicle, and prevent the occupant from being thrown from the vehicle. They also absorb energy by being designed to stretch during sudden deceleration, so that there is less speed differential between the passenger's body and the vehicle interior, and also to spread the loading of impact on the passenger's body.

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.
- Forty-two percent 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.

Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia have mandatory seat belt laws (the exception is New Hampshire). Seat belt use is 13 percent higher in states with primary enforcement (88 percent) than in states with secondary enforcement (75 percent).

- 31 states plus the District of Columbia have primary enforcement of seat belt laws, meaning police can stop vehicles and write citations for failure to buckle up.
- 18 states have secondary enforcement, meaning police can issue a seat belt citation only after a vehicle is stopped for another reason

The Department of Transportation believes that nearly 40 percent of unbelted truck driver fatalities could have been prevented with a seat belt, while up to 70 percent of moderate injuries could have been reduced.

Putting on your seat belt should become a routine every time you enter your vehicle, the same as putting your key in the ignition.