



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **87 PERCENT OF MINNESOTA MOTORISTS BUCKLE UP**

*Click It or Ticket Belt Enforcement Continues Through Oct. 19*

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ST. PAUL — In the midst of a 10-day statewide *Click It or Ticket* seat belt enforcement campaign that concludes Sunday, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) announced the state's overall seat belt use compliance is 87 percent, comparable to the record-high 88 percent use rate recorded in 2007. DPS conducted a two-week motorist observational survey in August of more than 12,000 motorists in 37 counties. The state will receive \$15.2 million in federal funds for both behavioral traffic safety initiatives and road safety improvements as an incentive for recording two consecutive years of belt use above 85 percent.

Nationally, the belt use rate is 83 percent, but 75 percent for states with a secondary seat belt law, such as Minnesota. Despite the high rate in Minnesota, unbelted motorists account for around 200 traffic deaths each year and more than 400 serious, life-altering injuries. In the last three years, 2005–2007, more than half — 612 — of 1,212 total motorists killed were not belted.

“While the majority of Minnesotans buckle up, increasing the compliance rate will save hundreds of traffic deaths each year,” says Cheri Marti, director of the DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “When you don’t buckle up, your chances of surviving a crash are cut in half.”

Pick-up truck drivers have the lowest belt use among all vehicle types (76 percent), but their belt use is steadily increasing, up from 69 percent compliance in 2003. Motorists in SUVs are most likely to be belted (92 percent), followed by passenger cars (89 percent) and vans/minivans (88 percent). Young motorists ages 16–29 have the lowest seat belt use rate of 82 percent — but an improvement from 74 percent compliance five years ago. Belt use among motorists 65 years or older is 91 percent. In the “battle of the sexes,” females are more likely to buckle up (92 percent) than males (83 percent).

— MORE —

A portion of the \$15.2 million incentive funds will be put toward traffic safety behavioral efforts and outreach initiatives targeted at high-risk driver behaviors contributing to crashes. The proposed behavioral initiatives include speed enforcement and education activities, advanced teen driving programs, and targeted seat belt observational surveys to determine problem areas. The funds will also support low-cost proactive engineering improvements on state and local roads to prevent lane departure crashes and improve lighting, signage and pavement markings at intersections. These proposed improvements also include safety enhancements such as edge-line or center-line rumble strips, cable median barriers, and enhanced curve delineation. Priority will be given to deploying these safety enhancements where highways transition from four to two lanes, according to the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The state will receive the federal dollars in spring 2009.

“These traffic safety tactics are cost-effective measures that can make a life-saving impact on Minnesota roads,” says Marti. She adds the future initiatives reflect the major components that are the foundation of *Toward Zero Deaths (TZD)*, the state’s cornerstone traffic safety program. *TZD* focuses on the application of four strategic areas to reduce crashes — enhanced enforcement, engineering improvements, education and effective emergency trauma response.

The *Click It or Ticket* seat belt enforcement effort is emphasizing special nighttime seat belt patrols. DPS 2005–2007 data reports there were 296 vehicle occupant traffic deaths during nighttime hours (9 p.m. – 3 a.m.) and 184 of the traffic crash victims — 62 percent — were not belted. Around 400 agencies are participating in the campaign. Belt citations can cost up to \$115.

The DPS survey also reports 4.2 percent of motorists are on cell phones at any given daylight hour — translating to approximately 15,750 motorists dialing and driving at any given hour. Officials say this rate probably could be higher as a majority of Twin Cities’ metro roads were not surveyed. The national cell phone use rate is 6 percent.

See the entire observational survey report at [www.dps.state.mn.us/ots](http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ots) under “What Is New.”

**Driving Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths.**

**Editor’s Note:** *County-by-county seat belt fact sheets are available upon request email [Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us](mailto:Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us).*