



## NEWS RELEASE

Andy Skoogman, Director of Communications

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 8, 2009

**CONTACT:**

Nathan Bowie, 651-201-7571

### **MINNESOTA SEAT BELT COMPLIANCE RATE HITS ALL-TIME HIGH** *First Statewide Enforcement of Primary Seat Belt Law Clicks-Off Friday*

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) officials say the primary seat belt law has helped the state achieve a record-high 90 percent seat belt compliance rate — up from 87 percent in 2008 — according to findings from a new survey released today. As a result, officials credit the primary law in part for the state's continued decline in motorist deaths for 2009. To-date, 239 motorists have been killed on Minnesota roads, compared to 246 at this time last year.

The announcement of the survey results comes as 400 Minnesota law enforcement agencies mobilize for an Oct. 9–22 *Click It or Ticket* seat belt enforcement campaign — the first full-scale enforcement since the primary seat belt law became effective June 9.

DPS reports awareness, education and enforcement of the primary law as factors in changing motorist behavior to increase belt use. Minnesota's primary belt law states drivers and all passengers — including in the back seat — must be buckled up or in the correct child restraint. Law enforcement can stop motorists directly for seat belt violations, including unbelted passengers.

"Hitting 90 percent belt use is a significant milestone and points to the effectiveness of the primary law," says Cheri Marti, director of the DPS Office of Traffic Safety. "As a result, Minnesota motorists are safer and needless tragedies on our roads are being reduced."

DPS conducted its annual two-week motorist observational survey in early August of 11,524 motorists in 37 counties to determine the new belt use rate. The increase in belt use is reflected in preliminary 2009 data. From June 9 to Oct. 2, the number of unbelted traffic deaths dropped 10 percent compared to the same time period in 2008. Marti says that this signals more Minnesotans are buckling up. Typically, more than half of motorist deaths are unbelted.

Marti says the *Click It or Ticket* enforcement effort is intended to help maintain the momentum of increased belt use and to reinforce to motorists that the primary law is important and saves lives. Participating agencies will also conduct special nighttime patrols. DPS 2006–2008 data reports 277 motorists were killed during nighttime hours (9 p.m.– 3 a.m.) and of those killed 178 (64 percent) were not belted. Each year nearly 80 percent of drinking drivers killed are also not belted.

A belt citation is \$25 but ends up costing more than \$100 when factoring administrative fees. Each year in Minnesota, around 200 unbelted motorists are killed and another 400 unbelted motorists suffer serious, life-altering injuries.

—MORE—

**Page 2**  
**Record-High Belt Use**

Alcohol  
and Gambling  
Enforcement

Bureau of Criminal  
Apprehension

Driver  
and Vehicle  
Services

Emergency  
Communication  
Networks

Homeland Security  
and Emergency  
Management

Minnesota  
State Patrol

Office of  
Communications

Office of  
Justice Programs

Office of  
Traffic Safety

State Fire Marshal

**Oct. 8, 2009**

Marti stresses that motorists not only wear belts, but wear them correctly. Belts should be low and snug across the hips; shoulder straps should never be tucked under an arm or behind the back.

Other findings from the DPS motorist observational survey include:

Belt use was lowest for pick-up truck occupants (84 percent) — yet this is still a major gain from their 2008 rate of 76 percent. Van/minivan motorists have the highest compliance (95 percent).

Overall, females have a higher belt compliance (92 percent v. 89 percent for males). This belt use gap between the sexes has drastically shrunk — especially among the 16–29 age group. Last year, females in this age set had a 10 percent higher belt use rate than males, now it is only a 2 percent difference.

16–29 year olds have the lowest belt use among all age groups at 88.5 percent, while 11–15 year olds have the highest at 96 percent. DPS officials say this statistic points to the peer pressure factor among teens — once teens begin riding with other teens, their belt use drops.

The survey cites 5.6 percent of drivers as using hand-held cell phones, translating to approximately 21,000 drivers dialing and driving at any given daylight hour in Minnesota.

