

PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT OF SEAT BELT USE LAWS

Policy Statement

WHEREAS, the effectiveness of occupant restraint devices of various types and for different age groups in reducing death and injuries has been documented worldwide.

WHEREAS, there is a strong correlation between the restraint use of children and the driver of their vehicle.

WHEREAS, states with primary seat belt use laws have an eleven to fifteen percent higher usage rate than states without primary use laws.

WHEREAS, restraint system usage in the United States trails the usage rates in other industrialized countries where strict and routine enforcement is carried out.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine supports the immediate implementation of primary enforcement of occupant restraint use laws for all ages in all states.

Adopted: September, 2003

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Background Information

According to the National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA), seat belts are the most effective safety device in vehicles and their increasing use has saved more than 135,000 lives since 1975. In 2001, seat belt use in the United States was about 73 percent. [1].

Primary belt laws allow police officers to pull over and cite motorists simply for not using their safety belt. A secondary law only allows police officers to give a belt citation if the motorist is pulled over for another infraction. [2].

While a law is only as good as its enforcement we have consistently seen higher use rates in states with primary laws. In 2002, belt use in primary states was 11 points high than in secondary states (80% vs. 69%). [2], [4], [3].

The lower rates associated with secondary laws have real consequences. Safety belts are approximately 50% effective for preventing fatality in severe crashes. Belts save 13,000 lives each year, while 7,000 die because they did not use belts. [2].

The restraint use of fatally injured child passengers and their drivers are strongly correlated. Child passengers are far more likely to be unrestrained if their driver is unrestrained and similarly, child passengers are far more likely to be restrained if their driver is restrained. [5], [6].

References:

- [1] U. S. Department of Transportation Press Release, Office of Public Affairs, January 18, 2002.
- [2] NCSA, Donna Glassbrenner, Research Note, May 2003
DOT HS 809587, Safety Belt Use in 2002 Use Rates in the States and Territories.
- [3] U. S. Department of Transportation, NHTSA, Research Note February 2001:
Observed Safety Belt Use, Fall 2000 National Occupant Protection Survey.
- [4] U. S. Department of Transportation, Office of Public Affairs, Press Release, Sept. 6, 2000 pp2.
- [5] NCSA, Starnes M., Research Note The Relationship Between Driver and Child Passenger Restraint Use Among Fatally Injured Child Passengers Age 0 – 15.
- [6] NCSA, Starnes, M., Research Note The Relationship Between Driver and Child Passenger Restraint Use Among Infants and Toddlers.