

Time to bust the myths about seat belts

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Credit: Steffen Thoma/Public Domain

When it comes to wearing seat belts, some motorists incorrectly think they are protected by the size of their vehicle, their seating position or where they are driving, said a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

The truth is that wearing a seat belt is the best way to protect everyone in the vehicle in a crash, said Bev Kellner, AgriLife Extension program manager for passenger safety, College Station.

While nine out of 10 Texans now buckle up, some groups of [motorists](#) still aren't taking the message to heart and aren't consistently using [seat belts](#), Kellner said. She hopes to use the annual Click It or Ticket campaign to provide more education.

This year's campaign is scheduled for May 18-31, which includes Memorial Day weekend. During this time, extra law enforcement representatives will be on the roads enforcing the seat belt and child restraint laws in an effort to save lives.

"Those officers are not out to write tickets but instead want to help prevent needless tragedy from motor vehicles crashes," she said.

"Remember to buckle up and save your life – not just during Click It or Ticket, but every day of the year."

Kellner outlined some myths about wearing a seat belt:

- **Vehicle type:** There seems to be a misconception among those who drive and ride in pickup trucks that their large vehicles will protect them more than other vehicles in crashes. But the numbers say otherwise, she said. Sixty-three percent of pickup truck occupants who were killed were not buckled up. That's compared to 43 percent of passenger car occupants who were killed while not wearing their seat belts. Regardless of vehicle type, seat belt use is the single most effective way to stay alive in a crash.
- **Seating position:** Too many people wrongly believe they are safe in the back seat unrestrained. Half of all front-seat occupants killed in crashes in 2012 were unrestrained, but 61 percent of those killed in back seats were unrestrained.
- **Rural versus urban locations:** People who live in rural areas might believe their crash exposure is lower, but in 2013, there were 13,038 crash fatalities in rural locations, compared to 8,079

crash fatalities in urban locations. Out of those fatalities, 51 percent of those killed in the rural locations were not wearing their seat belts, compared to 46 percent in urban locations.

Too many drivers and passengers continue to risk injury or death by not using seat belts, Kellner said. In 2014, the Texas Department of Transportation reported 2,587 motor vehicle crashes in Texas in which unrestrained vehicle occupants sustained fatal or serious injuries.

Almost 3,500 traffic deaths occurred in Texas in 2014 – up 3 percent from 2013. In 2014, of all people killed in vehicles in Texas, 44 percent were reported as not wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash.

"After so many years of having seat belts standard in vehicles, it would seem that buckling your seat belt before driving off would be second nature," Kellner said.

"Fortunately, most of us do buckle up. But some, especially pickup truck drivers and their passengers, depend on their bigger pickup truck to protect them in a crash. Yet, pickup trucks are twice as likely to roll over as passenger cars, and pickup truck crashes can be especially serious – even deadly – due to their tendency to rollover and for unbuckled occupants to be thrown from the vehicle."

Unbuckled passengers can also be deadly to others in the vehicle, she said. Most people are not aware of the dangers posed by unbuckled backseat passengers. In a crash, they can become projectiles that are tossed around inside the vehicle, injuring or killing those in the front seat.

Riders in the back seat who use lap and shoulder belts are 44 percent more likely to survive in a crash than unrestrained occupants in passenger cars, and 73 percent more likely to survive in passenger vans

and SUVs, Kellner said.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, young adults are dying at a disproportionate rate because they are not wearing their seat belts. In 2014, 293 drivers and passengers ages 15-20 died as a result of traffic crashes in Texas. Of those fatalities, 134, or 46 percent, were not wearing their seat belts at the time of the crash.

When the Click It or Ticket campaign began in 2002, just 76 percent of Texans used seat belts, Kellner said. Today, more than 90 percent of Texans buckle up.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that from 2002 to 2014, the Click It or Ticket campaign in Texas resulted in over 4,300 fewer traffic fatalities, while preventing almost 73,000 serious injuries, and saving \$16.7 billion in related economic costs.

"Here's another good reason to buckle up – it's the law," Kellner said.

Drivers and adult passengers not buckled up can face fines and court costs of up to \$200. Children younger than 8 years old must be in a child safety seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4 feet 9 inches. Fines issued to drivers for unrestrained children in their [vehicle](#) can be as high as \$250 plus court costs.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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