

HENNEPIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

News Release



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Seat Belt Enforcement Campaign Begins October 9

October 7, 2009 (Minneapolis) – Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, Champlin, Dayton Police Departments along with Hennepin County Sheriff's Office deputies will conduct enhanced Click It or Ticket seat belt patrols October 9–22. This is the state's first full-scale seat belt enforcement effort since Minnesota's primary seat belt law became effective in June.

The primary law requires passengers in all seating positions — including the back seat — to be buckled up or seated in the correct child restraint. Law enforcement officers can stop and ticket motorists solely for seat belt violations, including unbelted passengers. A seat belt citation is \$25 but can run as much as \$115 with court and administrative fees.

The state's primary seat belt law is intended to boost belt use compliance to prevent death and injury. During 2006–2008, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) reports 1,097 motorists were killed in crashes — 539 were unbelted — and another 1,152 unbelted motorists were seriously injured. In Hennepin County, 102 motorists were killed — 40 were not belted — and another 114 unbelted motorists were seriously injured.

Law enforcement will further focus their enforcement efforts toward special nighttime seat belt enforcement patrols. Data from DPS during 2006–2008, shows that 277 motorists were killed during nighttime hours between 9 p.m. – 3 a.m. Of those killed, 178 victims (64%) were not belted.

Officers and deputies are also concerned about belt use among teens and young adults — the groups least likely to buckle up and who are overrepresented in traffic deaths. Statewide each year, motorists ages 15–29 account for 45 percent of all unbelted deaths, yet this group represents only 25 percent of all licensed drivers. Of these unbelted deaths, 80 percent occur in Greater Minnesota. This same age group accounts for 55 percent of all unbelted serious injuries — 70 percent occur in Greater Minnesota.

In a similar seat belt enforcement effort last May, Officers and deputies issued 142 seat belt citations. Approximately 400 law enforcement agencies statewide will participate in the effort coordinated by DPS as a component of the state's Toward Zero Death (TZD) initiative. TZD is a multi-agency approach to address traffic issues regionally through enforcement, education, engineering and emergency trauma care.

The Sheriff's Office would also like motorists to remember that text-messaging, emailing or accessing the Web on a wireless device while driving — including while stopped in traffic — is illegal on Minnesota roads. The violation can cost up to \$300 and applies to drivers of all ages. As a primary offense, law enforcement can stop a motorist if they observe a violation of law.

According to DPS, crashes in which distraction or inattention was a factor — including text-messaging or cell phone use — are vastly underreported. The state reports distraction was a factor in at least 15 percent of all fatal crashes during 2005–2007, resulting in 240 traffic deaths. Another 1,163 motorists suffered serious, life-altering injuries as a result of distracted driving crashes during this period. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says distraction is a factor in about 25 percent of all crashes.

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