

Seat belt laws

Law



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Jennifer Isaac English 112 November 10, 2011 Say Yes to Life and Saving Money

As I sit at a red light, a car rushes past and collides with another vehicle in the intersection. I call 911 then, after a few minutes, an ambulance pulls up on the scene. The EMT pulled a man from his car; his head a bloody mess from the impact with the windshield. They put him in the ambulance, after a bit of trouble getting him on the stretcher, and rush him to the emergency room. Later that night while watching the six o'clock news I see an interview with the police chief; he states that the man died in the hospital. However, the driver likely would have lived if he would have been wearing his seat belt. With scenes such as this, it is evident that seat belt laws should be in effect as well as enforced. Vehicle fatalities have a big impact on mortality rates and insurance premiums; therefore, enforcing seat belt laws can have a positive effect on society. Automobiles have progressed through the years, and have become faster, yet the faster you go the greater the impact when an accident occurs.

Federal and State agencies have developed speed limits and other guidelines, which when enforced, help keep passengers safe. Even though these laws are in place, accidents still occur; however, when the proper precautions are taken, risks can be minimized. As technology progresses so will vehicles; therefore, safety will continue to be a major concern. It is up to the motorists to decide to wear a seat belt, yet law enforcement officers are the ones who are there to enforce seat belt laws. Seat belts are installed into every car and truck, but should we have to wear them?

Every state has a different law about who does and does not have to wear them, but in the state of Indiana if you are in a car that is equipped with seat

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belts and anyone above the age of 14 you are required to wear a seat belt. Also, children must use the correct car seat for their weight until they reach 135 centimeters tall or their 12th birthday, whichever comes first. There are several other reasons that you do not need to wear a seat belt such as if you are a driver who is reversing, or supervising a learner driver who is reversing, in a vehicle used for police, fire, and rescue services, a passenger in a trade vehicle and you are investigating a fault, driving a goods vehicle on deliveries that is traveling no more than 50 meters between stops, or a licensed taxi driver who is 'playing for hire' or carrying passengers (Using, 1). If there is a reason that you cannot wear a seat belt due to medical reasons, your doctor must issue you a 'Certificate of Exemption for Compulsory Seat Belt Wearing'. You must keep this in your car at all times and handy if a police officer pulls you over.

There are strict seat belt laws world-wide but, according to statistics, they are hardly followed. Approximately 50% of lives will be saved in an accident if people wear seat belts. Seat belt safety statistics show that mostly the younger population between the age groups 16-35 is hardly found wearing seat belts. Seat belt facts also prove that 70% of the people wearing a seat belt have prevented injuries even on meeting with an accident. It is found that nearly 10, 000 lives can be saved every year only by wearing a seat belt (Pandit 1).

According to studies cited by the Independence Institute, "When subjects who normally did not wear seat belts were asked to do so, they were observed to drive faster, followed more closely, and braked later. In other words, people who are naturally cautious voluntarily choose to wear seat

belts, and voluntarily drive safely. When reckless people are forced to wear seat belts, they “compensate” for the increased safety by driving more recklessly. Furthermore, no jurisdiction that has passed a seat belt law has shown evidence of a reduction in road accident death. (Veksler 1) Seat belts were designed to save peoples’ lives, this only works if they are worn correctly or even at all. Many people do not wear their seatbelts because they do not believe in their efficacy, because they have heard that wearing seat belts might actually cost them their lives in certain types of accidents (Mikkelson 1). The constitution allows everyone to have the freedom rights, but how fair is it for the government to dictate what we can and can’t do when it comes to wearing a seat belt. The U. S.

National Highway Safety Bureau first required automobile manufacturers to install lap belts for all seats and shoulder belts for front seats in 1968; however, most Americans did not regularly use safety belts until 1984, when the first state laws were passed mandating seat belt use. As of today, there are 48 states in which it is illegal for a driver or passenger to travel without a seat belt (the exceptions are Maine and New Hampshire). Of those 48 states, 10 have primary enforcement, meaning that police can stop and ticket a motorist simply for not wearing a seat belt.

The other 38 states with seat belt laws have secondary enforcement, meaning that police can only ticket people not wearing seat belts if they pull the car over for some other reason. If not all states have to wear them, then why make it a law? Many fatalities that are related to vehicle accidents can be avoided if the occupants wear their seat belts. Some say seat belts can be the cause of deaths. Although this may be true, it is proven that in most

cases seat belts are far more likely to save a life than kill the occupants of a vehicle.

As written in the World Almanac and Book of Facts, “ In 2006, safety belts and child restraints saved an estimated 15, 808 lives” (“ U. S. Motor” 1746). Seat belts do save lives; therefore, the laws that promote their use should be enforced. When police have the authority to stop a motorist solely for not wearing a seat belt, which is called primary law, motorists have more of a reason to wear their seat belts. Furthermore, vehicle insurance premiums could decrease if seat belt laws are followed.

It makes sense that insurance companies charge more because accidents are escalated due to negligence of the driver by not wearing his seat belt. This point is reiterated in the Hudson Valley Business Journal: “ The safer all drivers are, the fewer injuries there will be, which affects everyone’s insurance premiums” (“ Seat Belts” 18). If drivers would just take that extra step before driving, and buckle their seat belt, society as a whole might notice a decrease in insurance premiums in the future. Insurance providers may not notice the change right away, but in the long run they would have to notice that fatalities are decreasing.

Though law enforcement programs such as Click-It-Or-Ticket help raise the use of seat belts, they do so by threatening drivers with fines for not buckling up. Laurie F. Beck, from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control wrote, “ Although rates of safety belt use in the United States have increased substantially since the first state law was passed in 1984, many motor vehicle occupants continue to travel unrestrained” (1619). Sometimes threats stop short of reaching the amount of people intended.

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Perhaps if programs were developed to reward drivers who get pulled over and are wearing their seat belt, then we would see a stronger increase in seat belt use. Patrol officers could be required to note when a driver was properly restrained; that information could be provided to insurance companies; those companies would know which motorists were driving safely, and could reward them with discounted premiums. We as American citizens should have the choice in if we wear them or not. There are many reasons that many people do not wear them, but here are just a few.

Some people feel if they are going a speed of less than 40 mph, then they do not need to wear them; however the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) states that 80 percent of all crashes come at speeds of less than 40 mph and 75 percent of those are within 25 miles of home (Silverman 1). Another reason people do not wear their seat belts are because they believe they are uncomfortable. They believe the combination of the lap and shoulder belt is uncomfortable, so they either do not wear it or they put the shoulder belt under their arm. In doing this, it can cause internal injuries if they were ever in an accident.

A different reason that some people do not wear their seat belt is because they feel their independence is being taken from them for being told what to do in their car. They feel that their car is their fortress and they should not be told what to do in it, especially by the government. Some people feel that if they are thrown from a car they have a better chance of being saved then staying in the car with the accident. This is not true according to the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office; individuals who get thrown from their cars are more likely to get killed than those wearing seat belts (Silverman 2).

Finally, many drivers say they want to increase their chances of surviving a car fire or a submerged car. They feel that if they are buckled is it not only going to take longer to get out of the car, but if they are dazed or not alert, it is going to hinder their chances of getting out of the car alive. Less than 1 percent of all accidents involve car fires or submersion. If some type of reward program happened to be in place, the scenario earlier could have ended differently. Maybe the driver would have suffered some type of injury, yet the seat belt could have stopped him from hitting his head on the windshield.

Although seat belt laws promote the reduction of vehicle related fatalities and help decrease the cost of insurance premiums, other programs such as a reward program could further reach motorists. The more benefits motorists see about wearing seat belts the greater the chance they will choose to wear them. References: Beck, Laurie F. , et al. " Associations Between Sociodemographics and Safety Belt Use in States With and Without Primary Enforcement Laws. " American Journal of PublicHealth97. 9 (2007): 1619-1624. Biomedical Reference Collection: Basic. EBSCO. Web. 29 Sept. 2011.

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