



Oregon

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DATE: February 14, 2007
TO: House Committee on Transportation
FROM: Troy E. Costales, Transportation Safety Administrator
SUBJECT: House Bill 2275 - Safety Belt Law

Introduction

HB2275 will extend the safety belt law to cover privately owned commercial vehicles which are designed or used primarily for the transportation of property, including pickups weighing over 10,000 pounds.

Background

Safety belts are proven highly effective in reducing crash injuries and fatalities. Since passage of the adult belt law in 1990, Oregon's crash injury and fatality rates have dropped 43% each and belt use has doubled to 97% compliance. Removal of this exemption is expected to increase belt use and help further the reduction in crash injury and fatality rates. Removal of the exemption will make the list of exemptions consistent and easier to identify. This will benefit primarily vehicle operators, law enforcement and the traffic courts.

Discussion

This exemption was part of an original list adopted by the Legislature in 1983. A review by the Attorney General's Office in 2000 indicates Oregon's original safety belt laws gave priority to protecting child passengers and commercial vehicles were exempted as unlikely to transport children.

Oregon's safety belt law was broadened in 1990 with passage of the adult belt law and today all passenger vehicle occupants are required to use a safety belt or child restraint system unless specifically exempted under the law. The 2005 Oregon Legislature removed an exemption for privately owned commercial vehicles that transport persons for a fee such as cabs, shuttles, vans and limousines. Motor carriers became subject to state safety belts laws in 2003. However, privately owned commercial vehicles which are designed or used primarily to transport property, remain exempt.

This remaining exemption for commercial vehicles is inconsistent with other exemptions from safety belt laws. Generally those exemptions involve either public safety vehicles, such as ambulances or police cars, vehicles not originally equipped with safety belts, or drivers who are repeatedly and frequently in and out of their vehicles for the type of work they are performing.

Specifically included are persons being transported in police custody, emergency medical technicians giving aid, mail and newspaper delivery, meter readers, mass transit operators, and solid waste collectors.

On the road, law enforcement cannot distinguish which of these vehicles could be exempt from the safety belt law since they do not display commercial plates (if under 10,000 pounds) and don't display business signage reflecting a commercial use.

The exemption for commercial vehicles presents an obstacle to improved compliance. Observed compliance with safety belt laws is currently 97% among occupants of passenger vehicles but only 90% among occupants of pickup trucks.

What the Bill Does

HB2275 would extend safety belt requirements to any vehicle designed or used to transport property, including pickup trucks.

Summary

Safety belts save lives, prevent injuries and reduce the toll on Oregonians from traffic crashes. Over the past two decades the types of vehicles on our streets has changed and the need for a commercial vehicle exemption is no longer necessary.