



Oregon Department of Transportation

NEWS RELEASE

Transportation Safety Division

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Enforcement blitz to focus on child passenger safety

From Feb. 4 – 17, Oregon law enforcement agencies will be keeping a keen eye out to help ensure motorists are correctly buckling up – themselves and their passengers. Since Oregon’s child seat laws changed last July 1, the emphasis will be on making sure child passengers are buckled in correctly.

“We’re taking this opportunity to educate people about the child seat laws and remind them to buckle up every person, every trip,” said Carla Levinski, the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Occupant Protection Program manager.

Lack of safety belt use was a major factor in half of Oregon’s traffic deaths in 2007. More than a third of children injured in crashes were unrestrained, held on laps or using adult belt systems instead of appropriate child seats.

The enforcement blitz, a federally funded program administered by ODOT’s Transportation Safety Division through the Oregon State Sheriffs Association, Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and Oregon State Police Patrol Division, involves 27 sheriff offices, 63 police departments and the OSP.

“Consistent, proper safety belt use is the single most effective way to protect people and reduce fatalities in motor vehicle crashes,” said Captain Gerry Gregg, director of the OSP Patrol Services Division.

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Oregon's new child seat laws established the following requirements:

- A child weighing less than 40 pounds must be restrained in a child safety seat.
- A child under one year of age or weighing less than twenty pounds must be restrained in a child seat, rear facing.
- A child over forty pounds but under age eight or less than 4' 9" tall must be restrained in a booster seat that elevates them so the lap/shoulder belts fit correctly.

In addition, Oregon's safety belt law no longer exempts commercial vehicles "designed or used to transport property." Drivers and passengers in this category are now required to use proper safety restraints (includes all types of trucks, vans, and passenger cars, including those used for bulk transport, specialized delivery services, or movement of materials in conjunction with various projects or activities).

Since the passage of the adult belt law in 1990, statewide crash fatality and injury rates in Oregon have each dropped 43 percent. In 2007, Oregon belt usage went up to an all-time high of 95 percent (front seat occupants) and 97 percent (all seating), placing Oregon among the top five belt-use states. By comparison, the nationwide belt use average for front seat occupants is 80 percent.

"Active enforcement practices and child seat checkup stations have helped get the message across that using safety belts and child safety seats is critical to safe travel," Levinski said. "Continued education and enforcement are needed to maintain our high belt use and improve compliance, particularly with Oregon's booster law, which is currently only at 62 percent. To facilitate compliance with car seat laws and improve child passenger safety, ODOT has allocated \$200,000 to provide car seats and boosters for low income families this year."

ODOT will distribute funds through local programs. For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/safetybelts.

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Proper use of safety restraints

Proper use” is required by Oregon law and means using the entire belt system, lap belt low across hips, and shoulder belt over collarbone and crossing center of chest. Belts should be free of slack and lying flat with no twists or knots. If the shoulder belt portion of your adult safety belt rides up onto your neck or feels uncomfortable, you may increase your comfort by sliding the built-in adjuster up or down or by moving your seat position. Do NOT place your shoulder belt under your arm or behind your back – this can cause serious internal injuries or ejection in a crash. For help with repair, installation or retrofitting of safety belts, call your vehicle dealer or vehicle manufacturer’s customer service department.

Child passenger protection

While it is not Oregon law, it is strongly recommended that children aged 12 and under ride in rear seating positions. Research indicates that such rear seating reduces the risk of injury by 37 percent for that age group. For help with child safety seats, refer to the seat manufacturer’s instructions, vehicle owner’s manual or call ACTS Oregon Child Safety Seat Resource Center at 1-800-772-1315.

2007 Enforcement stats

During the 2007 grant year, \$818,502 of federal traffic safety overtime generated 69,909 total enforcement contacts and paid officers to staff child seat checks and other local educational events. Total overtime contacts were as follows: 25,207 safety belt; 828 child seat; 13,205 speeding; 544 DUUI; 2,442 suspensions; 516 felonies; and 27,167 all other violations.

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