



Oregon Department of Transportation

NEWS RELEASE

Transportation Safety Division

Sept. 7, 2006
06-193

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Enforcement blitz to focus on top 3 factors in fatal crashes

Law enforcement agencies in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia will focus a safety blitz Sept. 11 through 24 on the three most common factors in deadly traffic crashes.

The Three Flags Campaign, named for the two states and one Canadian province in the Pacific Northwest, uses periodic enforcement blitzes and public information campaigns to promote proper use of safety restraints and to deter speeding and driving under the influence of intoxicants.

“In Oregon, those are the three leading factors in fatal crashes – excessive speed, DUII and failure to use safety restraints,” said Carla Levinski, passenger restraint program manager at the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Safety Division. “Ironically, every one of those factors is under drivers’ and passengers’ control – including using the proper restraints for children.”

In fact, Levinski said, ODOT is recommending that parents go beyond Oregon law when it comes to children’s safety.

“The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is now recommending that children use booster seats until they are at least 4-foot-9 so that they have the full protection of the adult-sized seat belt,” Levinski said. “And despite Oregon law prohibiting minors from riding in the open beds of pickups, there have been several cases recently of children being ejected from pickups in crashes.”

Oregon is among the top five states in the nation with 94 percent seat belt use, according to a front-seat survey this summer. And yet the unbelted 6 percent accounted for 38 percent – more than one-third – of fatalities in traffic crashes in Oregon during 2005.

“In fact, with the proven life-saving impact of seat-belt use, the Oregon Legislature extended the state’s seat belt law – effective since January this year – to include occupants of commercially operated passenger vehicles, such as taxicabs and shuttle buses equipped with belts,” Levinski said. “Seat belts are the simplest and cheapest way to reduce fatalities in motor vehicle crashes.”

All occupants age 16 and older are responsible to buckle themselves up, and adult passengers are responsible for properly restraining children under 16 in seat belts or child safety seats. Only taxi drivers are exempt from the law.

“Now that school’s back in session, it’s important not to take a risk when you’re taking your children to school, for example,” Levinski said. “Everyone needs to buckle up every trip, so that they’re safer from the unexpected.”

Law enforcement agencies also will be on the lookout for people driving too fast for road and traffic conditions – the leading factor in Oregon fatal crashes – and DUII, an element in more than one-third of deadly crashes. Police also watch for drivers following too closely – the single most common factor in all types of vehicle collisions in Oregon, not just fatal crashes.

Drivers also need to remember that Oregon law requires motorists to move over to another available lane when approaching the rear of an emergency vehicle on the side of the road with its emergency lights activated. If another lane is not available, drivers must slow down. Violation of this law can cost \$355.

Oregon adult seat belt law

- Oregon law requires that all motor vehicle operators and passengers be properly secured with a safety belt or safety harness.
- This means that both parts of a lap and shoulder belt system must be worn together, only one person per belt, and no placement of the shoulder belt behind the back or under the arm. Any of these situations places the vehicle occupant at severe risk of internal crash injury.

Oregon child restraint law

- Children under 4 years of age **OR** weighing less than 40 pounds must be restrained in child seats.

- Children over 4 **OR** weighing more than 40 pounds must use booster seats until they attain 6 years of age **AND** weigh at least 60 pounds.

Recommendations for children

- While it is not the law in Oregon, it is strongly recommended that children aged twelve and under ride in rear seating positions. Research indicates that such rear seating reduces the risk of injury by 37% for that age group.
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that children use booster seats until they are at least 4 feet, 9 inches tall so that they gain the full benefits of adult-sized belts.

Commercial vehicle belt use

- Effective Jan. 1 this year, Oregon's safety belt law requires occupants of commercial vehicles used for the transportation of persons for compensation or profit and which transport 15 or fewer persons, to use safety restraints. This applies to occupants of such vehicles as shuttles, taxis, limousines and vans. Among these types of vehicles, taxi cab drivers are the only occupants excepted from this law.
- ODOT is providing FREE "Seatbelts must be worn in this vehicle" to any transportation provider who wishes to post them in their vehicles and can be ordered by contacting the Transportation Safety Division at 800-922-2022 (statewide) or 984-4190 (Salem).

Minors in pickup beds

- Minors – anyone under the age of 18 – are prohibited from riding in the open bed of a pickup unless traveling in the scope of employment or between hunting camps.

Safety belt comfort tips

- Use the built-in adjuster. These adjusters are located in outboard seating positions and slide up or down to change the angle at which the shoulder belt comes over your shoulder. Look for them near the highest point of your shoulder belt mounting.
- Adjust your seating position, either by moving yourself in the seat or by using vehicle seat height adjustments. Again, you are trying to change the angle at which the belt comes over and across your shoulder.
- Use a padded belt cover to cushion between the shoulder belt and your neck.
- Use an "after-market" belt adjuster. These types of adjusters are easily installed, removed, or transferred among seating positions or different cars. They are made from fabric or plastics, come in various designs, and are available in stores that sell auto accessories including places like Fred Meyer. This type of adjuster commonly snaps on to the shoulder and lap portions of the belt near the buckle and changes shoulder belt angle by pulling the two portions of the belt closer together. After-market belt adjusters are not safety tested, regardless of what the labels indicate.
- Ask your auto dealer or vehicle manufacturer what they would recommend.
- When you shop for a new vehicle, make sure to test drive it with your safety belt on and check for comfort before you buy.
- For help with repair, installation or retrofitting of safety belts, call your vehicle dealer or vehicle manufacturer's customer service department.

More information on safety restraints: www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/safetybelts.shtml

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