



Technical Update

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Seat belts: A Lifesaving Choice

In the United States, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people under 30. The Colorado Department of Transportation reported that in 2016, 505 people were killed in auto accidents in the state of Colorado. Motorcycle accidents accounted for 125 of those deaths. Of the remaining 380 automobile accident deaths, 186 of the people killed were not wearing seat belts. That is a 60% fatality rate for non-seat belt wearers involved in an auto accident in the state of Colorado. One of the reasons for this higher than average fatality rate is that only an estimated 84% of Coloradoans wear seat belts, according to the Colorado State Patrol. Nationwide, 90% of drivers and passengers wear seat belts according to the U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

How Seat Belts Reduce Risk

In an automobile accident wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of death for the driver and front-seat passengers by 45%, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Not wearing a seat belt makes it 30 times more likely you will be thrown from the vehicle during a crash. This is a major cause of auto accident deaths as the person thrown from the vehicle is usually ejected directly into the path of the vehicle. In Colorado, seat belts are required for all front seat passengers and for children under 16. While you cannot be pulled over for not wearing a seat belt, if you are stopped for another reason you can be ticketed.

Why Seat Belts Work

Seat belts work by using a pendulum mechanism that forces a safety bar to engage when the vehicle experiences a sudden deceleration or crash. The safety bar tightens the seat belt's shoulder strap locking the wearer in place. This prevents the head and chest of the person wearing a seat belt from striking the steering wheel, dashboard, or windshield. "Vehicles have many more safety features today than ever before, but there is nothing more important than the simple seat belt," says Mark Rosekind, an NHTSA administrator.

What This Means for Counties

Section K Fleet Safety in the CTSI Loss Prevention Manuel details the steps member counties are expected to take to reduce accidents, injury, and loss of life in county vehicles. The policy states supervisors should, "Ensure that all employees are briefed and understand that the use of seat belts while driving or riding in a county vehicle is mandatory". For more information about fleet safety and the importance of wearing seat belts, please contact CTSI at 303-861-0507. 