



It Is Time for Primary Seat Belt Legislation in Minnesota

Minnesota's seat belt law is more than 20 years old. Times have changed — public opinion on seat belts has strengthened, health care costs have soared and hundreds continue to die or suffer serious, life-altering injuries each year in preventable tragedies. A primary law is the simplest and most effective way to prevent death or injury at no extra cost to Minnesota.

Save lives and prevent life-changing injuries.

- While a majority of Minnesotans wear seat belts, those that don't — around 13 percent, or 700,000 people — account for 200 deaths and around 430 serious, life-altering injuries each year. These motorists have not responded to educational efforts and voluntary compliance.
- 26 U.S. states that have upgraded to a primary seat belt law have reported significant increases in seat belt use. In Michigan, belt compliance increased from 70 percent to 97 percent.
- A primary seat belt law would increase Minnesota's belt compliance, and as a result, save up to 30 lives and 200 to 400 serious, life-altering injuries each year.
- A primary law would have the greatest impact on Minnesotans that are least likely to buckle up and more likely to die in crashes — teens, young males and residents in Greater Minnesota. Each year, nearly 80 percent of unbelted traffic deaths occur on Greater Minnesota roads.
- An American Academy of Pediatrics study reports a correlation between driver seat belt use and child restraint use. When a driver does not buckle up, children are restrained only 25 percent of the time. When a driver buckles up, child passengers are restrained nearly 90 percent of the time.

Save on health care costs.

- There are far-greater, longer-term medical charges commonly associated with unbelted motorist injuries compared to belted motorists. These include follow-up doctor and specialist care, injury rehabilitation, and extended nursing or assisted-living care.
- During 2004–2005, unbelted injured motorists had hospital charges 60 percent greater than belted motorists.
- During 2004–2005, state-supported Medicaid paid almost \$1.6 million for unbelted motorists' hospital charges. Unbelted motorist injury charges were 78 percent greater for Medicaid than belted motorists.
- An estimated 1,900 people each year could have avoided hospital treatment if a seat belt had been used.
- An \$11 million savings in hospital charges is projected in the first year after adopting Primary, assuming a 95 percent seat belt use rate.

Prevent tragedies among African-American, Hispanic and other minority populations.

- Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for Hispanics ages 1-34 mirroring the general population. Crashes are the second leading cause of death in African-Americans of all ages.
- Minority populations are less likely to be belted in a fatal crash.
- Primary seat belt laws in other states have increased belt use among minority groups.

Minnesotans agree with primary enforcement.

- Approximately two-thirds of Minnesotans agree that law enforcement should stop a vehicle for a seat belt violation, according to a 2008 Corona Research survey.
- A wide range of organizations, ranging from public and private employers to industry associations to health care to law enforcement, support a primary seat belt law.

Improve transportation infrastructure and traffic safety with federal incentive funds.

- The state stands to gain up to \$3.4 million upon passing a primary law.
- The funding can be used for transportation infrastructure safety improvements as well as programs addressing high-risk driving behaviors.