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“CLICK IT OR TICKET”

Changes to Nighttime Seat Belt Enforcement for the First Time

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_____ Co, WA - A big change is underway for Washington State’s “Click it or Ticket” campaign which could change seat belt enforcement efforts throughout the United States. For the first time since the project’s inception, seat belt patrols are moving to nighttime hours, starting on May 21.

“Many people think that law enforcement can’t see unbuckled motorists at night so seat belt use is lower and consequently the nighttime death rate is four times what it is during the day. This project will change that,” said Lowell Porter, Director of the Washington Traffic Safety Commission.

Patrolling for seat belt violators is more difficult at night because it is hard to see the seat belt, however the Washington State Patrol pioneered an enforcement method that will be used statewide for this “Click it or Ticket” project, and involves both an observational officer and several pursuit vehicles. Once an unbuckled motorist is spotted, the observing officer radio’s ahead to the pursuit vehicle to make the stop.

Looking at all vehicle occupant deaths in Washington for the years 2001 – 2005, there were 2,366 vehicle occupant deaths: 1,153 (49 percent) occurred during the day (6 am – 6 pm) and 1,198 (51 percent) occurred at night (from 6:00 pm – 6:00 am). Though the number of people killed during the day is about the same as those killed at night, the death rate at night is approximately four to five times higher because traffic volumes are much lower at night.

Statewide, there will be 75 law enforcement agencies participating in the nighttime seat belt enforcement project. This includes #___ agencies in _____ County, including _____, _____, _____ Police Departments as well as the _____ Sheriff’s office and the Washington State Patrol.

“We know that people are most at risk of dying in a severe collision at night because more risky driving behavior takes place at night: more impaired driving, reckless driving and speeding, for example. So it makes sense to direct our law enforcement resources to a time and place where they will do the most good,” said Washington Traffic Safety Commission Director, Lowell Porter.

From 2005 through 2006, most seat belt tickets (85 percent) in Washington were written during the day, with only 15 percent written at night.

This new project is being funded by the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) with a special federal pilot grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The project is being viewed with great interest by NHTSA, as well as traffic safety professionals from other states.

NHTSA will conduct research on the results of the project to determine if it raises seat belt use at night. An observational survey of daytime and nighttime seat belt use will precede and follow the project, and as well, interviews of unbuckled motorists will be conducted.

Washington’s seat belt law passed in 1986 and at that time only 35 percent of motorists buckled up. Washington’s primary seat belt law (which gives law enforcement the authority to pull over unbuckled motorists) became effective in June, 2002, at which time, seat belt use in the state hovered between 79 percent and 82 percent. The “Click it or Ticket” campaign was adopted in 2002 and since its inception; seat belt use has risen to 94 percent. It has hovered between 94 percent and 96 percent ever since.

Today, Washington has the highest seat belt use ever recorded in the United States and the world at 96.3 percent. This use rate was determined by a statewide observational survey done in June, 2006. The survey involved 105,720 vehicle drivers and passengers. It was conducted statewide in 19 counties (eastern and western WA) on a variety of road types following research protocols established by NHTSA.

The nation’s seat belt use average is 81 percent.

For additional information about the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, visit www.wtsc.wa.gov