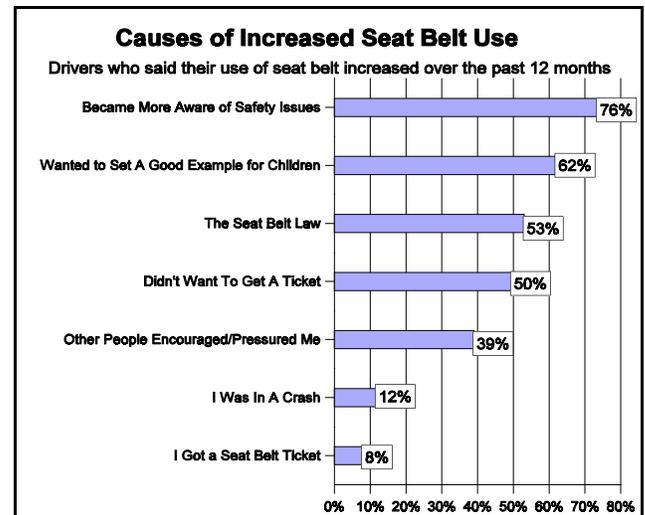


## 2000 MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANT SAFETY SURVEY SHOWS CONTINUED GAINS IN SEAT BELT USE

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducts a national telephone survey every two years to monitor the public's attitudes about seat belts, child restraints, reasons for their use or non-use, knowledge of seat belt laws, experience with law enforcement, and attitudes about risk perception. The 2000 survey consisted of two questionnaires, each given to a randomly selected sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 and older, with younger ages oversampled. Interviewing ran from November 8, 2000 through January 21, 2001.

### Seat Belt Use When Driving

- More than four-fifths (83%) of drivers said they used their seat belt *all the time* compared to 79% two years earlier<sup>1</sup>. Among those whose belt systems did not have an automatic component, *all the time* use was lowest among those with lap systems only (61%) and highest for those with lap and shoulder systems (83%). For two-piece belt systems, drivers were much more likely to use their lap belt *all the time* if the shoulder belt was manual (92%) rather than automatic (62%).
- *All the time* use was **lower** for males (79%), drivers ages 21-24 (76%), pickup truck drivers (74%), and drivers in rural areas (78%). Nearly the same proportion of blacks (81%) as whites (83%), but more Hispanics (88%) than non-Hispanics (83%), reported *all the time* use.
- Eight percent of drivers who said they wore their belt *all the time* also said they had not worn their seat belt while driving in the past day or week. Almost 70% of *most of the time* users made the same admission. These findings are consistent with previous years.



- There are more adjustable shoulder belts in the vehicle fleet, with 48% of drivers now saying they had them, compared to 43% in 1998. If drivers used the adjustable feature (68%), they usually were able to make themselves more comfortable (94%). *All the time* seat belt use was slightly higher (85%) among drivers who had adjustable shoulder belts than among those who said they did not (82%).
- About one-third of drivers (35%) said they at least sometimes drive as part of a job or business. More than half of these drivers (55%) believed their company had a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job. Drivers' reported seat belt use tended to be higher if they thought their company had a seat belt policy.
- Reported seat belt use was lower among persons who tended to drive faster. Drivers who said they tended to pass others (78%) were less likely to wear their seat belt *all the time* than those who tended to drive slower than prevailing traffic (86%).

<sup>1</sup> Self-reported seat belt use traditionally is higher than observed seat belt use. The National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) is NHTSA's official seat belt use measure.



### Reasons For Use And Non-Use

- Safety remained the foremost reason that drivers gave for wearing seat belts; 64% said that avoiding serious injury was their most important reason.
- There was no change in the two reasons that drivers said were most responsible for the times they did not wear seat belts: they were only going a short distance (24%) or else forgot to put the seat belt on (24%). These two reasons were characteristic of part time seat belt users, who substantially outnumbered drivers who rarely or never wore their belts. The primary reasons for non-use among the *rarely* or *never* drivers included discomfort, concerns about seat belts being dangerous, personal freedom, absence of habit, and the simple claim that they just did not feel like wearing them.

### Attitudes About The Usefulness Of Seat Belts

- The vast majority of the public (94%) strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement “*If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.*”
- More than one-third of the public (36%) either strongly (14%) or somewhat (22%) agreed with the statement “Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.” As reported belt use increased, agreement with this statement decreased.
- The fatalistic belief that wearing seat belts did not matter because “*if it is your time to die, you’ll die*” was more prevalent among drivers who reported lower levels of seat belt use (21% among *all the time* users, 33% among *most of the time* users, 43% among *some of the time* users, and 56% among *rare/never* users). Blacks (36%) and Hispanics (30%) were more likely to agree with this statement than whites (23%) and non-Hispanics (25%).

### Seat Belt Laws And Their Enforcement

- Almost nine-in-ten persons (87%) favored laws that required drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts. Most (61%) also believed that police should be allowed to stop a vehicle if they see a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken. The proportion of drivers who reported wearing seat belts *all the time* was higher in States where police had this authority (88%) than States where they did not (80%).
- Fewer than half of drivers (42%) considered it likely that they would be ticketed if they did not wear their seat belt at all over the next six months. Blacks (54%) and Hispanics (57%) were more likely than whites (40%) and non-Hispanics (41%) to believe they would be ticketed. Both groups also showed a higher level of support for seat belt laws and their enforcement than whites and non-Hispanics did.

### HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of **2000 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (Volume I: Methodology Report; Volume II: Seat Belt Report)** write to the Office of Research and Traffic Records, NHTSA, NTS-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096 or download [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)

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