Busting Seat Belt Myths

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Why the heck are we STILL talking about seat belts?
Traffic-related fatalities hit 40,100 in 2017, the 2nd year in a row the 40,000 mark was surpassed (National Safety Council, 2018)
How Does Virginia Compare

As of 2018

49 states and District of Columbia - some form of mandatory seat belt use laws

34 states and D. C. = Primary Enforcement of front seat

29 states and D.C. = Enforcement for rear seat

NHTSA District #3 – Virginia is the only 2nd enforcement state

Virginia = Secondary Enforcement front seat passengers 18 and over, no coverage for back seat passenger over 18
How Did We Get Here?

From 1996 – 2018

78 separate bills have been introduced to change, strengthen, or weaken Virginia's occupant protection laws.

Other efforts: scare tactics, high visibility selective enforcement, Vince & Larry-Crash Dummies education, social conscience efforts, technology

Child passenger safety efforts have been successful!
Virginia statistics

- 2014 = 77.3% use rate
- 2015 = 80.9% use rate
- 2016 = 79.0% use rate
- 2017 = 85.3% use rate
- 2018 = ?

2014: 256 unrestrained fatalities
2015: 355 unrestrained fatalities
2016: 346 unrestrained fatalities
2017: 351 unrestrained fatalities
But What About…

- Safety belt convictions have decreased each year for the past 3 years by as much as 9.8% each year. Va DMV, 2017

- Over 50% of all fatalities each year were not wearing a seat belt.

- Insurance costs for the injuries
THE FULL IMPACT OF MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES

For every 1 person killed in a motor vehicle crash

8 people were hospitalized

99 people were treated and released from emergency departments
Where do we want to be?

Virginia Highway Safety Stakeholders
Survey Results of Priority Highway Safety Areas

Please rank the answer choices in order to reflect your priorities, with 1 being your highest priority

Child Passenger Safety - Bein facing until 2 years of age

Crash Investigation - Permit expert testimony in court cases

Decriminalization of Marijuana - Exempt possession of marijuana in a motor vehicle

Distracted Driving - Prohibit hand held devices

Distracted Driving - Prohibit hand held devices in work zones

Open Container Law - Remove exceptions

Pedestrians - Require stop rather than yield

Seat Belts - Primary Law

Speed Cameras - Allow for automated enforcement of speed limits

Statutory Speed Limit - Decrease from 55 mph to 45 mph.

Answered: 14  Skipped: 0
Why can’t we get there?

Personal Liberty Vs Public Safety
Government Intrusion Concerns
Racial Bias Concerns
Lack of Judicial Support
Non issue with Constituents
Lack of Public Support
Declining fatality rates
Busting Myths and Other Tactics

- Better Education?
- Heavier Enforcement?
- Legislation?
- Reaching constituents?
- Higher Fines?
- Insurance Claims?
Insurance Implications

• Safety belt use implications in civil suits — 16 states allow the "safety belt defense," which can reduce damages collected by someone in a crash if the person failed to buckle up. The reduction is permitted only for injuries that would have been prevented by a belt.
Old Tactics/New Tactics

- High Use Rates Associated with Strong Enforcement Laws (NHTSA, 2003)
- Identify vulnerable populations
- Constituency call to action
- Victim advocates
- Inclusion of additional “power” groups
Old Call To Action

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead
“It Will Take A Village”

It will take an entire community of different people interacting with those in power in order to see a positive change in our current laws.

Advocacy will be required from more members of our society to impact change.
Thank You

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