



## **Buckling Up: The Simple Choice That Can Save Your Life**

All of us are faced with hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions every day. Most don't involve life or death matters, but there is one simple decision that does have life-altering consequences. Choosing to wear a seat belt every time you're in a vehicle is one of those decisions. It's one act that can save your life or the life of someone you love. And it's also the law.

Whether you're the driver or a passenger sitting in the front seat or the back, Texas law now requires everyone in a vehicle to be secured by a seat belt. Children under the age of 8 must be in a child safety seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4 feet 9 inches.

Most Texans are buckling up, thanks to the Texas Department of Transportation's annual *Click It or Ticket* safety campaign. Every May, thousands of local law enforcement agencies join the Texas Department of Public Safety to ticket anyone who isn't wearing a seat belt or whose children aren't properly secured.

The threat of getting an expensive citation has been a powerful motivator to get more drivers and passengers to buckle up. Since the *Click It or Ticket* campaign began eleven years ago, the state's seat belt use rate has steadily climbed, and now almost 94 percent of motorists in Texas buckle up. The net effect is fewer deaths and injuries. TxDOT's crash statics indicate that 95 percent of the 778,448 Texans involved in crashes in 2010 where there were no injuries were wearing seat belts.

Texas now ranks seventh in the nation for seat belt use. In spite of all the progress we've made, one group of motorists remains significantly less likely to buckle up. That group is pickup truck drivers and passengers. Since roughly one out of every four vehicles registered in Texas is a pickup truck and pickups are twice as likely as passenger vehicles to roll over in a crash, that's cause for concern.

According to a recent study by the Texas Transportation Institute, only 80 percent of pickup truck passengers buckle up. Compare that to the more than 90 percent of passengers in all other types of vehicles who regularly put on their seat belts. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that half of pickup drivers who died in traffic crashes in 2010 were not wearing a seat belt.

Not buckling up doesn't make sense – financial or otherwise. While a ticket for not wearing a seat belt can cost anywhere from \$25 to \$250 plus court costs that drive up the expense even more, drivers and passengers who do not wear seat belts put themselves at risk for the greatest cost of all – serious injury or death. Depending on the type of vehicle, wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of fatal injury by up to 60 percent.

For motorists who need the extra incentive to buckle up, law enforcement will be out in force on Texas streets and highways between May 21 and June 3 – including the Memorial Day holiday weekend – looking for and issuing a citation to drivers and passengers who aren't wearing seat belts. It comes down to this: if you're not buckled up, expect to pay up.

It doesn't matter what kind of vehicle you're in. It doesn't matter where you're sitting. It doesn't matter if it's day or night. The smart choice is to buckle up, every time, everywhere, and to make sure everyone in your vehicle does the same. Buckling up is the one simple decision that all of us can make every day to save not only our own lives but also those of our loved ones.

*Click It or Ticket.* It's the law.

– Carol Rawson, Director, TxDOT Traffic Operations Division

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