

## **Wisconsin's New Safety/Seat Belt Law:**

Any automobile sold in the state of Wisconsin must be equipped with safety belts.

All drivers of motor vehicles and all passengers over the age of four must wear safety belts.

These laws apply to Wisconsin residents and non-residents alike in all front seat positions and in rear seat positions with three-point belts. Children under four are required to be restrained in an appropriate child safety restraint.

Effective **June 30, 2009**, Wisconsin has what is known as a primary enforcement seat belt law.

A primary enforcement seat belt law allows police to stop and ticket a driver for not wearing a seat belt, just like any other routine traffic violation.

Where a primary enforcement law exists, seat belt usage is higher. States such as California and North Carolina have realized a significant increase in safety belt usage (to 80% in North Carolina) through the combination of a primary law and an aggressive awareness and enforcement effort.

Wisconsin law provides for a fine of \$10 and no points are assigned against a person's driver record. Those subject to the penalty include drivers, drivers with unrestrained passengers 4 to 16 years old and passengers at least 16 years old.

The penalty for violating the child passenger law involving a child under the age of 4 is not less than \$30 or more than \$75. The penalty for violating the child passenger law involving a child between the ages of 4-8 is not less than \$10 or more than \$25.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Safety Belt use in Wisconsin is behind the national average and neighboring states. Currently, Wisconsin's safety belt use rate is approximately 74 percent, which is one of the lowest in the nation (44th out of 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico) and well below the national average of 83 percent. Wisconsin is also behind neighboring states including Michigan and Illinois, which have safety belt use rates of more than 90%.

Wearing a seat belt is an incredibly effective and simple way to save lives. Some facts to consider: Consistent safety belt use is the single most effective way to protect people from being ejected from a vehicle or being thrown around violently inside it during a crash. According to national statistics, 77% of passenger vehicle occupants who were in serious crashes in 2006 and were buckled up survived the crash. In Wisconsin, a 10 percent increase in safety belt use would save about 44 lives and prevent 650 injuries each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Last year in Wisconsin, traffic crashes killed 54 teenagers (ages 16 to 19) and injured 5,600. Teen safety belt use is much lower than other age groups. This lack of safety belt use coupled with a lack of driving experience is a major reason why traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for young people nationwide.

The costs of not wearing safety/seat belts are also staggering. Drivers and passengers who are hurt or killed in traffic crashes because they didn't buckle up create tremendous economic losses, such as medical expenses and lost worker productivity. The rest of society pays for nearly 75% of these economic losses through higher insurance premiums, taxes, and other public funding, according to the National Transportation Safety Board. Each Wisconsin traffic fatality costs nearly \$1.2 million and each incapacitating injury approximately \$62,400 based

on National Safety Council estimates. In 2007, economic losses from traffic fatalities and injuries in Wisconsin were more than \$2 billion, according to the 2007 Wisconsin Traffic Crash Facts available at: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/motorist/crashfacts/index.htm>

Some additional resources are available at:

- **International Association of Chiefs of Police-Operation Kids**, (800) 843-4227
- **SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.**  
Call (800) 745-SAFE (7233) for a free safety seat evaluation. Visit their Web site for more information: [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)
- **Safety belt convincer device**  
Available for public events to dramatize need for safety belt use. A person gets buckled into a seat, which then slides down a ramp and stops abruptly. Contact: John Le Gault, (715) 284-5446, Cell (715) 797-7282, [j4beards@yahoo.com](mailto:j4beards@yahoo.com)
- **Rollover Convincer**  
A truck cab with dummy rolls over 360 degrees with and without safety belt. Contact: John Le Gault, (715) 284-5446, Cell (715) 797-7282, [j4beards@yahoo.com](mailto:j4beards@yahoo.com)
- **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Auto Safety Hotline**, (800) 424-9393, or (888) 327-4236 (also toll free); allows you to order free copies of the brochures Are You Using It Right, and Child Transportation Safety Tips. You can also visit their Web site at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov) which includes a wide variety of fact sheets and even a theater section especially for kids. NHTSA also has a Child Passenger Safety Seat Fitting Station Locator where you can search for Safety Seat fitting stations close to you.
- **Wisconsin Information Network for Safety (WINS)** is a statewide resource for child passenger safety and child safety seat questions. Information available on loaner seat programs, and costumes of Buckle Bear, Click-it the Cricket, and the crash test dummies are available for free loan. Safety belt incentive items are available at cost. Information on seat belt extenders and chafe guards for overweight and frail elderly people. 1-866-511-WINS (9467), [wins9467@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wins9467@sbcglobal.net), [www.wcpsa.com/WINS.htm](http://www.wcpsa.com/WINS.htm)
- **National Safe Kids Campaign** Web site at [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org) includes information on SAFE KIDS BUCKLE UP: e.g., child car seat locator, and car seat check up events. Call (800) 441-1888 for free materials. Wisconsin SAFE KIDS can put you in touch with a local SAFE KIDS Coalition, and they provide a wealth of child passenger safety resources; for example, Frequently Asked Child Passenger Safety Questions. (414) 390-2178

**Source(s) for this article:**

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/vehicle/seatbelt/index.htm>

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/vehicle/seatbelt/resources.htm>