

Half Of All Passenger Vehicle Occupants Killed In U.S. Crashes In 2021 Were Not Buckled

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Correct and consistent seat belt use is known to save lives, but in 2021, 50 % of passenger vehicle occupants killed in traffic crashes in were unrestrained – nearly 12,000 – the highest number in the preceding 10 years.

Those grim statistics were recently announced by the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) (NHTSA) in conjunction with its annual “Click It or Ticket” seat belt high-visibility enforcement campaign to encourage drivers and passengers to buckle up to reduce crash deaths.

“Putting on your seat belt only takes two seconds, but it can save your life,” Ann Carlson, NHTSA’s chief counsel, said in a statement.

Passengers and pickup truck drivers have had the highest percentage of fatalities for nearly 20 years, according to the federal agency. In traffic crashes in 2021, 60 % of pickup drivers who were killed were unbelted, compared to 49 % of SUV drivers, 47 % of passenger car drivers, and 44 % of van drivers. In that same year, 64% of pickup truck passengers killed in crashes were not wearing seat belts.

“Your seat belt is your best protection against serious or fatal injuries in a crash – and wearing your seat belt is also the law in most states,” Carlson added. “Whether you’re in the front seat or the back, use your seat belt on every trip, every time.”

The new data on unbelted fatalities was published in the federal agency’s recent [Occupant Protection Traffic Safety report](#).

As part of the 2023 “Click It or Ticket” campaign, state and local law enforcement agencies nationwide will work together from May 22 through

June 4 to protect drivers and passengers from the risks associated with riding in a vehicle unbelted and to promote more usage.

The campaign focuses on reaching drivers who are less likely to wear a seat belt, like night-time drivers and younger people. In 2021, a greater percentage of unrestrained fatalities occurred at night than during the day: 57% of people who died in nighttime crashes were unrestrained, compared to 43% who died during the day. And 61 % of passenger vehicle occupant fatalities in the 25-to-34 age group in traffic crashes that year were unbelted — the highest percentage of all age groups in the recent report.

“The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) rightly is bringing attention to the need for greater seat belt use,” Cathy Chase, president, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, said in a statement. “Seat belts save lives but only if people use them, and far too many do not.”

The U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and NHTSA must do more to improve motor vehicle safety, Chase said, including issuing the rear seat belt rule required in the 2012 [Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act](#). Europe “already has a rear seat belt reminder requirement,” she said. “Considering the skyrocketing number of people unnecessarily dying on our roads, this commonsense measure must be completed with all urgency.”

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