



OCCUPANT PROTECTION

PRIMARY ENFORCEMENT SEAT BELT LAWS

Issue

Seat belt use, reinforced by effective safety belt laws, is a proven lifesaver. Seat belts serve as the first line of defense against injury or death for vehicle occupants when crashes occur.

Impact

In 2021, more than 26,000 passenger vehicle occupants died in motor vehicle crashes, a 10% increase from 2020. Among passenger vehicle occupant fatalities that year, it is estimated that half were unrestrained.

Solutions

Laws, Technology
and Roadway Safety
Infrastructure

Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Laws for All Occupants

Safety Technologies and Improved Safety Standards Can Protect Vehicle Occupants and Other Road Users

- Proven collision avoidance systems in vehicles including AEB, LDW, BSD, rear AEB, and rear-cross traffic alert should be required.
- Rear seat belt reminders.

Road Safety Infrastructure Improvements and the Safe System Approach



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The Facts

- From 1975 to 2019, seat belts have saved over 403,000 lives and over \$2.5 trillion in economic costs.
- The NHTSA estimated that needless deaths and injuries resulting from non-use of seat belts cost society more than \$11 billion annually in medical care, lost productivity, and other injury-related costs based on 2019 data. When adjusted solely for inflation, this would equate to more than \$13 billion.
- In 2021 among passenger vehicle occupant fatalities with known restraint use, 49% seated in the front row and 57% of those in the second row were unrestrained.
- In fatal crashes in 2020, 83% of passenger vehicle occupants who were totally ejected from the vehicle were killed. Only 1% of the occupants reported to have been using restraints were totally ejected, compared with 26% of the unrestrained occupants.
- For passengers who survived fatal crashes in 2021, only 15% were unrestrained, compared to 50% of those who died.
- NHTSA has identified a lack of seat belt use as one of “three major behavioral factors” that explain some of the increase in crash fatalities between 2020 and 2021.
- The use of seat belts in passenger vehicles saved an estimated 14,653 lives nationwide in 2019. An additional 2,398 lives would have been saved in 2019 if all unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants had worn their seat belts.
- Rear seat passengers are more than twice as likely to die in a crash if they are unbelted.
- Adults are not buckling up in the rear seat as much as they are in the front seat, with rear seat belt use 10 to 15% lower than in the front seat, according to a study by the IIHS and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).
- Rear seat belt use by passengers in fatal crashes was lower than front seat belt use in almost every state and was substantially lower in many states.



- Unbelted rear seat passengers pose a serious threat to the driver and other vehicle occupants, as well as themselves. Unbelted rear seat passengers are referred to as “back seat bullets” because they can be thrust at high rates of speed into the driver resulting in loss of control of the vehicle and into other occupants causing fatalities and serious injuries. The chance of death for a belted driver seated directly in front of an unrestrained passenger in a serious head-on crash was 2.27 times higher than if seated in front of a restrained passenger.

[Click here to learn more](#)



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Advocacy

“The Click Clack Front and Back Club: Students Working to Upgrade New Jersey’s Rear Seat Belt Law”



USING VIDEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO GET THEIR MESSAGE ACROSS

View the student video on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/ETkA3bDrPq4?si=awyg8jyNOGwa5NFA>

STUDENT CLUB ADVOCATES FOR SAFER ROADS

Students at Indian Hills High School in Oakland, NJ, formed the Click Clack Front and Back Club in 2019, and they quickly began advocating for legislation to upgrade the state’s rear seat belt law to primary enforcement. In 2021, they successfully engaged a [Senate sponsor](#) and soon after an [Assembly sponsor](#) for the seat belt legislation. This effort was driven in part by concern for their fellow teens. The students stated that teens are more likely to buckle up if they believe they must do so because there is clearer enforcement of seat belt laws. The students have been lobbying state legislators, working to generate grassroots support, and garnering media attention to help build support for the effort. As students have graduated, new students have joined the club to continue the momentum. At their end of school year party in 2023, Gov. Phil Murphy (D-NJ) joined the students virtually and affirmed the importance of seat belt use. The students were encouraged by the Governor’s message and are hopeful that their continued efforts will lead to legislative success in 2024.

LOOKING TO 2024

Leading up to the 2024 state legislative session, the students are laying the groundwork by building grassroots support and educating policymakers and the public about the importance of upgrading the seat belt law to primary enforcement for all occupants. The ultimate goal is to get everyone to buckle up on every trip to save lives. [Advocates](#) is glad to continue partnering with the Click Clack Front and Back Club including developing strategy, meeting to discuss updates, honing text, and providing information and resources. We look forward to building momentum for successful action in 2024.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Promoting seat belt safety

We are members of Indian Hills High School’s “Click Clack Front and Back” club, promoting seat belt safety in our community.

Last year, we initiated a conversation about enhancing the New Jersey seat belt law to reflect the importance of seat belt usage in the entire vehicle. In 2020, New York state added a rear seat belt requirement, among other improvements, to its seat belt law. As new drivers, we know that every occupant should wear a seat belt, but not everyone does. In several states, seat belt use rates increased 10% to 15% when primary enforcement was implemented.

Secondary enforcement laws, like the current New Jersey rear seat belt law, require police to first observe another violation, like speeding, before they can enforce a lack of seat belt use. Primary enforcement would help deter those who might not buckle up and would protect everyone in the car — unbelted occupants can become deadly projectiles in crashes.

We recognize that teenagers are more inclined to engage in safe behavior when legal aspects are involved. On May 17, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released the following update: 42,915 people died in crashes last year, a 10.5% increase from

2020. It’s time to upgrade our seat belt law and save lives.

Jill Fackelman
Sent on behalf of 27 student members of the Click Clack Front and Back club of Indian Hills High School in Oakland.



OCCUPANT PROTECTION

ALL-RIDER MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

Issue

Motorcycles are the most hazardous form of motor vehicle transportation.

Impact

In 2021, 5,932 motorcycle riders were killed, an 8% increase from the previous year. This is the highest fatality total in a single year since data collection began in 1975.

Solutions

Laws, Technology
and Roadway Safety
Infrastructure

All-Rider Helmet Requirements Are Effective, Reduce Costs and are Supported by the Public –

According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, “laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets are the only strategy proved to be effective in reducing motorcyclist fatalities.”

Safety Technology to Prevent Motorcycle Crashes

- Proven collision avoidance systems in vehicles including AEB, LDW, BSD, rear AEB, and rear-cross traffic alert should be required to detect and safely respond, as appropriate, to vulnerable road users (VRUs) including motorcycle riders.
- Motorcycle anti-lock braking systems were associated with a 22% reduction in the rate of fatal crash involvements, according to IIHS research, and should be required as standard equipment.

Road Safety Infrastructure Improvements and the Safe System Approach



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ALL-RIDER MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

The Facts

- In 2021, when helmet use was known, 39% of motorcyclists killed were not wearing a helmet.
- The observed use rate of U.S. DOT-compliant helmets among motorcycle riders was just over 86% in states with all-rider helmet laws, compared to only 53% in other states in 2021.
- Motorcycle helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 69% and reduce the risk of death by 42%.
- Annually, motorcycle crashes cost nearly \$17 billion in economic impacts and \$107 billion in societal harms measured by comprehensive costs based on 2019 data. Accounting for inflation alone, in 2023, this would equate to over \$20 billion in economic impacts, and over \$127 billion in societal harm. Serious injuries and fatalities accounted for 83% of total comprehensive costs of motorcycle crashes, compared to 60% of the total comprehensive costs of all motor vehicle crashes.
- According to NHTSA, in 2021, there were 9.6 times as many unhelmeted fatalities (2,038 fatalities) in states without a universal helmet law compared to states with a universal helmet law (213 fatalities).
- In states without all-rider helmet laws, 57% of motorcyclists killed in 2021 were not wearing helmets, compared to 10% in states with such laws.
- In Michigan, which repealed its all-rider law in 2012, there would have been 26 fewer motorcycle crash deaths (a 21% reduction) that year if the helmet mandate was still in place, according to the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. Additionally, in the remainder of the year after the helmet repeal was enacted, only 74% of motorcycle riders involved in crashes were helmeted, compared to 98% in the same time period of the previous four years.
- A survey found a strong majority (82%) of Americans favored state laws requiring all motorcycle riders to wear helmets.



- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), in states with only youth-specific helmet laws, helmet use has decreased and youth mortality has increased. Serious traumatic brain injury among young riders was 38% higher in states with only age-specific laws compared to states with all-rider helmet laws.
- All-rider motorcycle helmet law repeal efforts, which include motorcycle education and training requirements, fail to meet the safety benefit provided by a universal helmet law. There is no scientific evidence that motorcycle rider training reduces crash risk.

[Click here to learn more](#)



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ALL-RIDER MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

Advocacy

Motorcycle Rider Group Pushes State Legislatures to Retain Existing All-Rider Motorcycle Helmet Requirements and Enact New Ones

holland
sentinel.com

“My Take: Preventing motorcycle rider deaths”

9/4/22

SPOTLIGHT: SMARTER FIGHTS FOR MOTORCYCLIST SAFETY

[Skilled Motorcyclist Association—Responsible, Trained, and Educated Riders \(SMARTER\)](#) is a nonprofit motorcyclist education association for riders, rider educators, policymakers, legislators, and others who care about the safety of motorcyclists. For more than 16 years, SMARTER has advocated for all-rider motorcycle helmet laws because the research proves they save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce medical care costs. Advocates has worked with SMARTER on dozens of legislative efforts during the past decade.

SMARTER's voice is critical in state legislatures when efforts to weaken existing laws for helmet requirements are considered, which is unfortunately an annual occurrence. Oftentimes other rider groups will paint their position with a broad brush, messaging that riders are opposed to all-rider helmet requirements. SMARTER's advocacy shows this is not true; many riders support all-rider helmet laws.

SMARTER believes motorcycle riders, motorcyclist safety advocates, and policy decision makers make better decisions when they are based on factual knowledge and the conclusions of quality research. The mission of SMARTER is, therefore, to gather, examine, catalogue, share, post, and distribute motorcyclist safety information and research and to advocate for the use of such knowledge as the basis of decisions.

The SMARTER website contains more than 400 research reports in 20 topic areas and makes their position clear:

Based on the research conclusions, SMARTER [supports](#) the enactment of all-rider helmet requirements and opposes the repeal or weakening of existing all-rider laws.

LOOKING TO 2024

SMARTER, [Advocates](#) and other public health and safety groups will continue the fight to keep riders safe by requiring helmet use for all riders and opposing efforts to repeal these laws. Rider fatalities and injuries are preventable, and the research is clear. Helmet use saves lives and all-rider motorcycle helmet requirements ensure helmets are worn.

In 2024 Advocates will work with SMARTER on opportunities to enact all-rider motorcycle helmet requirements as well as oppose those measures that would weaken existing laws. Our partnership on the federal level will continue to ensure the rule for AEB detects and responds to all road users, that vehicles equipped with ADS are required to appropriately detect and respond to motorcyclists and other VRUs, and to advance Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) as standard equipment for motorcycles, among other measures.

