

MN Belt Use Up in 2007; Majority Who Die Are Unbelted

As we look back at 2007 on Minnesota's roads, one of the big stories is the rise in seat belt use — to 88 percent. While officials speculate that some of the increase could be the result of media stories about the collapse of the I-35W bridge, in which many survivors credited their seat belts for saving them, the fact remains that most of us are buckling up.

However, the minority who aren't wearing belts account for more than half of the deaths on our roads, many of them teens and young adults. Fifteen to 24-year-olds make up 16 percent of licensed drivers, but were involved in 28 percent of all crashes, fatal and non-fatal. And preliminary statistics as we went to print showed an increase in traffic deaths over last year.

That's why we continue to urge your involvement in this critical safety issue. Traffic crashes are the leading cause of work-related death in Minnesota and the U.S. And deaths are the tip of the iceberg. Whether your employees drive as part of their job, or simply to and from work, traffic crashes are a critical factor affecting absenteeism and productivity. (And not just crashes your employees are directly involved in. If one of your workers has ever had a family member involved in a crash, you know the toll that can take on their time, attendance and concentration.)

We encourage you to take advantage of the resources we have to offer:

- Free print materials (brochure, posters, payroll stuffers, etc.) you can distribute to your employees
- Free traffic safety fact sheets, available online
- Training programs available for purchase
- Consultation regarding your specific traffic safety needs, and more.

On a regular basis, we alert you to national and statewide traffic safety awareness campaigns and enforcement periods, offering numerous resources and suggestions for how you can maximize your efforts by coordinating with these

ongoing activities.

Contact Minnesota NETS Coordinator Lisa Kons with questions or requests for materials and services: 651-228-7330/800-444-9150; kons@minnesotasafetycouncil.org. She can help you assess your needs and provide support for your traffic safety program.

New Winter Driving Brochure

The national NETS program has published a new brochure, "Safe Winter Driving Practices," available on the Minnesota NETS Web site in the "Resources" section. Material from the brochure is excerpted on the next page in a handout you can post or provide for employers — or order the brochure itself: contact Lisa or see <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/nets/N-res.cfm>.



Winter clobbered us early this year in many parts of the state. Your winter driving skills have probably gotten plenty of practice, but consider the following tips to help carry you through safely to the spring.



What your vehicle needs:

- **Get it serviced now**, if you haven't already. No one wants to break down in any season, but especially not on winter roads in Minnesota. Have your entire vehicle checked for leaks, bad hoses and other parts. The transition from summer to winter places a large strain on many parts of your vehicle.
- **Check your battery.** When the temperature drops, so does battery power. Plus, it takes more power to start your vehicle in cold weather than in warm.
- **Check your cooling system.** When coolant freezes, it expands, which can potentially damage your vehicle's engine block beyond repair. If your system hasn't been flushed for several years, have it done now to remove dirt and rust particles that can clog the cooling system and cause it to fail. Also, over time, rust inhibitors in anti-freeze break down and become ineffective.
- **Fill the washer reservoir and keep extra fluid on hand.** You can go through a lot of windshield wiper fluid pretty quickly in a single snowstorm, so be prepared.
- **Keep windows and mirrors clean.** Good visibility is always important, but even more so during the winter months when road conditions can make driving extremely hazardous.
- **Check your windshield wipers and defrosters.** Summer weather tends to dry out wiper blades, making them brittle enough to crack and come apart.
- **Inspect your tires** — check pressure (when you haven't driven for at least three hours) and tread. Tread should be at least 1/16 of an inch or greater on all tires.

What you should know and do:

- **If road conditions are bad, don't go.** If you have to drive, plan ahead, know your route and allow extra time. Keep your gas tank full.
- **If you go into a skid,** stay calm and ease your foot off the gas while carefully steering in the direction you want the front of your vehicle to go. This procedure, known as "steering into the skid," will bring the back end of your car in line with the front.
- **If you get stuck,** stopped or stalled in wintry weather, stay with your car. To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, don't run your car for long periods with the windows up or in an enclosed space. If you must run your vehicle, clear the exhaust pipe of any snow and run it only sporadically — just long enough to stay warm!

Stock Your Vehicle

Carry items for common winter driving tasks as well as emergency supplies:

- Snow shovel, broom, and ice scraper.
- Abrasive material, such as sand or kitty litter, in case you get stuck in the snow.
- Jumper cables, flashlight and warning devices, such as flares and markers.
- Blankets for protection from the cold.
- A cell phone, water, food, and any necessary medicine (for longer trips or when driving in lightly populated areas).

For more ideas, see "Winter Survival Kits for Your Vehicle" at www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/facts (select "On the Roadway").