

Seatbelt use is up nationwide, but not for truckers

The Good News

Seatbelt use for drivers across the nation continues to increase. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that safety belt use in the United States has reached 79 percent—the highest level ever. The number is up from 75 percent in the previous year's survey. These findings are excellent news. The NHTSA says that wearing a seatbelt reduces the risk of fatal injury from a collision by 45 percent.

The numbers for Colorado are also up. Adult seatbelt use is 77.7 percent—up nearly 5 percent from the previous year. Car safety restraint use for infants and toddlers (88 percent) and for children ages 4 through 15 (72 percent) is also up from the previous year.

The Bad News

Unfortunately, the results for commercial truck drivers are not so good. A Department of Transportation (DOT) survey found that only 48 percent of commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers wear their seatbelts. The DOT has formed a partnership with other organizations such as the American Trucking Association to combat the problem. The partnership is focused on educating the nation's 11 million truck drivers about the importance of wearing seatbelts. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Association gives the following reasons for using a seatbelt:

It's the Law—The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations require CMV drivers to wear safety belts. It states, "A commercial motor vehicle which has a safety belt assembly installed at the driver's seat shall not be driven unless the driver has properly restrained himself/herself with the safety belt assembly."

It's Safer—In the event of a collision or emergency situation, a driver's best chance of survival is remaining conscious and in place behind the wheel of their truck.

Safety belts prevent serious injuries and fatalities by preventing drivers from being ejected from their vehicles, shifting crash forces to the strongest parts of their bodies, and protecting their heads and spinal cords. Wearing a safety belt greatly reduces the chance of injuries or death. In rollovers, drivers are 80% more likely to die if they are not using their seatbelts.

It's the Driver's Responsibility to Control Their Vehicle—Safety belts provide drivers the best chance of remaining in control of their trucks in the event of a crash or an emergency situation.

It Affects Other People—The consequences of not wearing a safety belt can greatly affect the driver's family. A driver's family can be devastated if a driver is killed or seriously injured in a crash. Under the Colorado Workers' Compensation Act, if a driver files a workers' compensation claim for injuries incurred during an accident, the benefit can be reduced by 50% if the driver is assessed a safety violation for not wearing a seatbelt.

What Should Counties Do?

Many counties employ commercial motor vehicle drivers. Counties should encourage their drivers to buckle up at all times. Drivers who wear seatbelts are less likely to incur serious injuries.

Furthermore, all County Workers' Compensation Pool member counties are required to adopt and notify their employees of the Colorado seatbelt law. Failure of employees to use seatbelts while operating county vehicles is a violation of pool safety regulations and applicable penalties may be enforced by workers' compensation claims adjusters.

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