



NEWS RELEASE

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Agencies launch statewide seat belt enforcement campaign

May 24-June 6 "Click It or Ticket" grassroots effort involves 85 law agencies

The Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, State Police, Department of Transportation and Development, the Louisiana Municipal Association and others are coordinating an intensive public education and enforcement campaign designed to boost Louisiana's seat belt usage closer to the national average.

The May 24 to June 6 "Click It or Ticket" campaign enlists Louisiana's mayors, parish leaders and a host of community groups to raise awareness of the importance of using seat belts. Part of the awareness includes distribution of 2,500 new seat belt signs.

New laws, education and enforcement campaigns increased seat belt usage in Louisiana from only 12 percent in 1986 to 75 percent in 2004, where it remained in 2009. That is still below the national average of 83 percent in 2008.

Lt. Col. John LeBlanc, executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, said the 2010 Click It or Ticket effort involves a grass-roots and statewide approach to educating motorists regarding seat belt safety.

"We are counting on the combination of enforcement, broadcast advertising, grass-roots activities and the new signs to raise awareness of seat belt safety," LeBlanc said. "Buckling up every time you get in a vehicle is one of the most simple and effective ways of protecting yourself on a daily basis."

Col. Michael Edmonson, superintendent of Louisiana State Police, said troopers enforce the state's seat belt laws at all times but will be conducting special patrols during the Click It or Ticket campaign.

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“Statistics have consistently shown the use of seat belts saves lives and reduces injuries.” Edmonson said. “This coordinated effort between law enforcement and community leaders will strengthen our agency’s ongoing commitment to educating the public on the importance of buckling up. During the Click It or Ticket campaign, troopers will be concentrating their efforts on public education and strict enforcement of Louisiana’s seat belt and child restraint laws.”

The Louisiana Municipal Association is urging its members, including mayors and parish leaders, to help educate motorists by distributing newly created buckle up signs for placement in parking lots and other visible areas near roadways. The new red, white and blue signs say, “Buckle up America. There’s just too much to lose.” The signs, created by DOTD, have been distributed to communities across Louisiana.

The new signs are only one aspect of the statewide seat belt effort. At least 85 state and local agencies are participating in the campaign, which includes officers working overtime patrols dedicated to enforcing the state’s seat belt laws.

Tom Ed McHugh, executive director of the Louisiana Municipal Association, said he is urging the 305 members of LMA to participate by posting the new signs, enforcing highway safety laws and educating their constituents regarding seat belt use.

“In 2008 more than 900 people were killed in crashes in Louisiana and 65 percent of those victims were not buckled up,” McHugh said. “Many of those who have died in crashes might be alive today had they been buckled up.”

DOTD Interim Secretary Sherri H. LeBas said while safety innovations in vehicles and highways have helped reduce deaths and injuries from crashes, seat belts remain a vital element of passenger safety.

“While improvements in highway and vehicle designs have made driving safer and more efficient, drivers and passengers play a key role in their own safety,” LeBas said. “Seat belts are designed to save lives, but they can’t do that if motorists don’t buckle up as required by law.”

The Louisiana Highway Safety Commission is providing \$1.3 million for agencies around the state to pay officers overtime to conduct patrols dedicated to seat belt enforcement. The commission’s funds are provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is coordinating a nationwide Click It or Ticket campaign simultaneously with the Louisiana campaign.

Louisiana law requires that all vehicle occupants wear safety belts and that children under the age of 13 wear a safety belt and/or be restrained by an appropriate child safety seat regardless of seating positions. The state has a “primary enforcement” law for safety belts, meaning that officers can stop and ticket a driver that they spot not complying with the law.

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