



NEWS RELEASE

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More Alabamians used safety belts in 2001 than ever before recorded; state seat belt usage rate exceeds national average for first time

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Observational surveys found that Alabama's safety belt usage rates in 2001 increased to the highest rate ever recorded in the state, and rates exceeded the national average for the first time ever. The estimated safety belt usage rate was 79 percent, an approximate 11 percent increase from the 2000 survey result of 71 percent.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We are very pleased to see this landmark increase in seatbelt usage in Alabama. Factors possibly contributing to this improvement include the enactment of Alabama's primary seat belt law 1999, which made failure to wear safety belts a primary violation, and effective educational and enforcement efforts."

One successful effort was the "Click It or Ticket" campaign. Through this initiative, state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies conducted massive enforcement of the state's safety belt laws, with special emphasis on public safety checkpoints. This year the survey was conducted during a two-week period immediately following the campaign.

Safety belt restraint usage was observed for 40,000 drivers and front seat passengers within 15 selected Alabama counties. All counties, except for Montgomery with a 68 percent rate, improved from last year's safety belt usage rate. Jefferson County had an 86 percent seatbelt usage rate and Madison County's rate was 84 percent. Houston and Colbert counties each had an 80 percent seatbelt usage rate, the second and third highest rates of the surveyed counties. Etowah County's usage rate was 67 percent the lowest rate of the surveyed counties.

The survey determined that females' occupant restraint usage rate was 13.6 percent greater than the males'. The occupant restraint usage rate for Caucasians was 6.4 percent greater than the African Americans', and 32.9 percent greater than the Hispanics'.

Safety belt usage rates for other counties surveyed for the year 2001 were as follows: Blount, 70 percent; Escambia, 76 percent; Lawrence, 77 percent; Lee, 74 percent; Marshall, 75 percent; Mobile, 69 percent; Shelby, 81 percent; Tuscaloosa, 77 percent; and Walker, 79 percent.

The year 2001 marked the twelfth year that the required National Highway Traffic Safety Administration guidelines were followed for the surveillance procedures. In this scientifically drawn and conducted sample, data for all areas of the state from small town, to county, to urban roadways are included.

Fifteen counties actually compose the entire survey area, including the four metropolitan counties of Jefferson, Madison, Mobile and Montgomery. The other 11 counties were randomly selected from a pool of the 37 largest counties. A majority of Alabama residents are in the sample pool, because 85 percent of the state's population lies within these 37 counties.

Three hundred forty-five sites were selected and observed for one hour using the curbside lane as the reference position. At each site, surveillance was done to determine the number of people in the front seat of the vehicles and the number of these occupants wearing safety belts. The sites that were not surveyed during this period were surveyed over the next five months.

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