

Safety Belts Save Lives!

On June 4, 2010, three high school students, two brothers and a fellow classmate were driving home on their last day of school. The Illinois country road they were driving on became increasingly narrow. The narrowest part of the road was at the top of the hill where an oncoming car was approaching. In an effort to miss the car, the teen driver of the pickup truck swerved and hit a pot hole causing the driver to lose control and hit a tree.

Two of the teens sustained injuries and had to be extricated from the vehicle. All three of the teens survived this horrific crash because they were wearing their safety belts. They lived to tell their story because they took the extra few seconds needed to buckle their safety belts.

Unfortunately, not all crashes have a happy ending. In 2010, more than 900 people were killed on Illinois roadways; many were traveling in rural areas. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), only 23 percent of the United States population lived in rural areas in 2008 but rural fatalities accounted for 56 percent of all traffic fatalities. Speed, alcohol impairment and emergency response time may all factor into the increase in fatalities in rural areas, but the leading factor is lower safety belt use in rural areas particularly among



Two teens await extrication from their pickup truck after hitting a tree in rural Illinois. The brothers and fellow classmate all survived the crash because they chose to buckle their safety belts. All three teens received Saved By the Safety Belt Awards from the Illinois Department of Transportation's Division of Traffic Safety.

pickup truck occupants. In 2009, 68 percent of pickup truck occupants who were killed in traffic crashes were not buckled up. Women are more likely to buckle up than men, especially young men. In 2009, 66 percent of men ages 18 to 34 killed in passenger vehicles were not wearing their safety belts.

Why are pickup truck drivers choosing to buckle up less than occupants of passenger vehicles? Many feel pickup trucks are safer than passenger vehicles because they are large in size. However, trucks have a higher center of gravity which causes them to roll over more

frequently than smaller passenger vehicles. The higher rollover rate combined with the lower use of safety belts is a deadly combination resulting in more ejections in fatal pickup crashes. Safety belts offer the best protection in a rollover and can reduce the risk of dying by up to 80 percent.

During the month of May, the Illinois Department of Transportation's Division of Traffic Safety (IDOT/DTS) will join forces with more than 450 local, county and state law enforcement officers for the Click It or Ticket campaign. During this campaign, law enforcement officers will be on the lookout for unbuckled drivers and passengers and will issue tickets to those choosing not to buckle up. Many agencies will focus their efforts on nighttime enforcement to combat the increasing number of fatalities occurring during nighttime hours.

Our goal is simply to prevent injury and death on Illinois roadways. The loss of one life affects hundreds of people- husbands, wives, sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, neighbors, friends, co-workers and the list goes on. It is as simple as this. When you get behind the wheel, choose to buckle up; choose to put your child in a safety seat; choose to put your cell phone away; choose not to speed and choose not to drink and drive. These choices will save you money and could also save you the ultimate price - your life.

Visit www.buckleupillinois.org today to learn how you can get involved in our Click It or Ticket campaign.

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