

Governor's Office of Highway Safety

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NOVEMBER 2009



For more information:
Jim Shuler, GOHS Public Affairs
404-656-6996 or 888-420-0767
jshuler@gohs.state.ga.us

DANGER ON GEORGIA'S RURAL ROADS: *Click It Or Ticket* Country Roads Crackdown *Georgia Buckling-Down on Those Not Buckled-Up*

When you think about busy cities with speeding cars,, beeping horns, and hurried pedestrians, it always seems strange to hear the following statistic: Studies show that Georgia's rural roads are more dangerous than our busy interstates. ***Although only 25% of our population lives in rural areas, the number of deadly crashes out on country roads accounts for more than half of all traffic fatalities.***

That disparity is just too large to ignore. In 2008, 325 people died in crashes in the five metropolitan Atlanta counties. Compare that with 700 fatal crashes in Georgia's most rural counties. And it's not just a problem in Georgia! According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Americans driving or riding on rural roadways face a much greater risk of being injured or killed in traffic crashes than those in urban or suburban areas.

That's why Georgia's traffic enforcement officers will be on the look-out for safetybelt violators in Georgia's rural areas leading up to the Thanksgiving holiday. "We want to remind our rural drivers that Georgia is buckle-up country," says Director Bob Dallas of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS). "This isn't rocket science. It's just that simple. Safety belts save lives no matter what roads you're traveling on."

Dallas says *one factor in rural road traffic fatalities is the way many rural roads are constructed*: Compared to the safety of limited access highways, rural roads can greatly increase the risks of a fatal crash.

"One reason rural roads are more often the scene of fatal traffic crashes is because they're likely more narrow, with no median between you and the oncoming traffic," says Director Dallas. "There are also more access roads allowing for traffic to enter and exit rural highways. This combination can often become the formula for a crash waiting to happen and the best way to survive a crash is a properly buckled seatbelt.

"Unfortunately belt use in rural areas consistently trails the national average on urban highways," says Dallas. In 2008, only 79-percent of rural drivers and their passengers were nationally observed wearing their seat belts compared to 84-percent of urban motorists. That's why GOHS is sending out this statewide ***Click It or Ticket*** message to ***ALL*** drivers ***AND*** passengers, with a special enforcement emphasis on unbuckled drivers in rural areas.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety is launching this special, high-visibility ***Click It or Ticket*** rural roadway enforcement emphasis in conjunction with Georgia's November ***Click It or Ticket*** campaign leading up to the Thanksgiving holiday. The focus is to buckle-down on *all* motorists not buckling-up – especially those in rural areas.

Why? Because in 2008, 1,164 people died on Georgia's state and county roads, compared with 223 deaths on our interstate highways.

(MORE MORE MORE)

Governor's Office of Highway Safety Public Information Unit
Director Public Affairs, Jim Shuler – 404-656-6996 -- jshuler@gohs.ga.gov
34 Peachtree Street—Suite 800—One Park Tower—Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Visit us on the web at www.georgiahighwaysafety.org

Sonny Perdue, Governor

Robert F. Dallas, Director

Governor's Office of Highway Safety



(PAGE TWO)

"The worst part is that so many of these passenger car, pickup or SUV deaths could have been prevented if all rural road crash victims were wearing their safety belts," says Director Dallas.

Georgia crash stats show that in addition to those drivers and passengers in rural areas, others most at risk of experiencing a fatal crash are teen drivers – particularly young males, and pickup truck drivers and their passengers. In 2008, 4,417 teen passenger vehicle occupants, ages 16-20, were killed in motor vehicle crashes across the country. More than 61-percent were unrestrained at the time of the fatal crash. In comparison, Georgia experienced 154 teen passenger fatalities and more than 66-percent were unrestrained at the time of the crash.

Deaths involving pickup truck occupants also occur more on rural roads. And because of the higher center of gravity on pickups, there's a higher risk of vehicle rollover and occupant ejection during a pickup truck crash. And yet in 2008, safety belt usage rates for pickup trucks were only 74.3 percent versus 92.5 percent for all passenger vehicles. So in Georgia, nearly 70-percent of pickup truck occupants killed weren't buckled-up. In addition, nearly half of all fatalities on Georgia's rural roads involve light trucks. In light truck crashes, 81-percent of crash deaths are unrestrained.

Failure to wear safety belts in Georgia leads to an estimated 5,760 additional pickup truck injuries and costs Georgians \$346-million in related healthcare costs and economic losses. But so many of these are preventable losses! When worn correctly, seatbelts have been proven to reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat, light truck occupants by 60% and as much as 80% in the event of a rollover crash.

"We know many Georgians and motorists nationwide sometimes forget how important seatbelts are for saving lives," says Director Dallas. "Unfortunately, the tragic reminder is loved one killed in a car crash. This special holiday campaign helps us remind all residents and visitors that Georgia is Buckle-Up Country."

Just remember. No more warnings. No more excuses. And especially in Georgia's rural areas, **If You Don't Click It Expect a Ticket! — Click It or Ticket.**"

For more safetybelt information, please visit, www.gahighwaysafety.org/, www.region4ruralbeltproject.org or www.NHTSA.gov.

(END RELEASE)

Governor's Office of Highway Safety Public Information Unit
Director Public Affairs, Jim Shuler – 404-656-6996 -- jshuler@gohs.ga.gov
34 Peachtree Street—Suite 800—One Park Tower—Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Visit us on the web at www.georgiahighwaysafety.org

Sonny Perdue, Governor

Robert F. Dallas, Director