

Governor's Office of Highway Safety

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HOLIDAY TRAVEL FACTS: SURVIVING GEORGIA'S RURAL ROADS

State and local law enforcement will be out in force this November with a special *Click It or Ticket* seat belt enforcement mobilization aimed at saving more lives on Georgia's rural roadways. The Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) will launch a special "Buckle-Up Country" enforcement initiative November 16th to coincide with Georgia's traditional, statewide *Click It or Ticket* campaign. And during the "Buckle-Up Country" campaign, traffic enforcement officers all across Georgia will be writing tickets to *all* unbuckled drivers – especially those in rural areas.

Why target drivers on rural roads when Georgia already conducts a statewide seatbelt enforcement campaign during the Thanksgiving holiday travel season? Highway safety experts say it's to stop the disproportionate roadway death rates in our country communities. Rural residents actually drive at greater risk when their travel routes take them on rural roads close to home. It may *sound* improbable but highway safety data has determined:

- In Georgia's rural areas, the percentage of unrestrained passenger car occupants killed is greater than those in urban areas.
- Although only about a quarter of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, fatalities in rural areas account for more than half of all American traffic fatalities. Therefore Americans driving or riding on rural roadways face a much greater risk of being killed or injured in traffic crashes than those in urban or suburban areas.
- Nationally in 2008, 56-percent of passenger vehicle occupants killed in rural areas were not wearing their seat belts at the time of the fatal crash. Compare that to urban areas where 52-percent of fatalities were unbuckled.
- In 2007, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) was 2.5 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Part of the danger to rural drivers comes from delayed emergency response along isolated roadways. But much of the danger is also due to excessive speed, increased alcohol use, vehicle rollovers and higher occupant ejection rates resulting from low seat belt use.
- This lack of seat belt use is deadly. In fact, 67 percent of pickup truck drivers killed in traffic crashes were not buckled up at the time of the fatal crash.
- According to NHTSA, pickup truck drivers and passengers, particularly young males, consistently have the lowest seat belt usage rates of all motorists.
- 3,678 teen passenger vehicle occupants, ages 16-20, were killed in nationwide motor vehicle crashes in 2008, and 60-percent were unrestrained at time of the fatal crash.
- The lifesaving solution: When worn correctly, seatbelts are proven to reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat light truck occupants by 60-percent and as much as 80-percent in the event of a rollover crash.

By simply buckling their safetybelts motorists can reduce medical and legal expenses, lost wages and productivity, high insurance rates, and other burdensome costs that all drivers must share due to vehicle crashes. For more information about the lifesaving potential of wearing safetybelts, please visit www.NHTSA.gov, www.gahighwaysafety.org, or www.region4ruralbeltproject.org.

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