

MONTANA MOTOR CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

Good stuff.



Bill No. 11
Date 1-19-05
Bill No. SB 43



Driving Trucking Success

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, for the record I am Spook Stang Executive Vice President of the Montana Motor Carriers Association. The MMCA and its 800 members statewide would like to go on record in support of SB. 43

The Mission statement of the MMCA is: As responsible citizens we promote and represent safe professional and profitable Commercial Transportation interests with one voice. Because of MMCA's commitment to safety it was decided that the number one priority of the MMCA this legislative session would be to promote and work for the passage of a primary seat belt law in Montana.

The MMCA membership is committed to seeing that seat belt usage in Montana is a top priority. We were so committed that we invested \$10,000 of MMCA money into a media campaign last fall to educate Montanan's on the need for a primary seat belt law. We joined other groups in developing and promoting a web site committed to the education of Montanans. Most of the facts that are presented here today come from the website seatbeltmontana.com.

70% of Montana Fatalities not wearing a Safety Belt -- In 2003, almost 7 out of every 10-vehicle occupants who died in Montana were not wearing safety belts. And remember, even if you're a good driver, wearing your safety belt is your best defense against drunk, drowsy, and aggressive drivers.

After A Primary Law Passes..... -- During the first full year after enforcement of belt laws, fatality rates dropped 21 percent in five primary states compared to only 7 percent in 11 secondary law states. During the same period there was a 24 percent reduction in fatality rates for persons under 21 years old in the primary states compared to a 3 percent reduction for that age group in the secondary law states.

Saving Children's Lives Saves Parent's Lives -- Primary safety belt laws also help save the lives of children. Citizens are much more likely to buckle up and place their children in child safety seats when there is the possibility of receiving a citation for not doing so. NHTSA and State surveys have repeatedly and consistently shown that adult safety belt use is a strong predictor of whether children are appropriately restrained. However, in 2000, one out of every three children 5 to 15 years of age was unrestrained and traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among children in this age group.

A Primary Law Bumps Up Safety Belt Usage -- Primary safety belt laws have a proven track record of increasing a State's safety belt use rate: In June 2002, the average safety belt use rate in States with primary enforcement laws was 11 percentage points higher than in States without primary enforcement laws. If this were applied to Montana statistics we would save an addition 40 lives a year.

While the MMCA's prime objective to the passage of a primary seat belt law is safety, it should be noted that the economic costs to Montanans is becoming a burden. Studies have shown that the average workdays lost by an unbelted passenger are 90 days, while the average time lost by a belted passenger is around 14 days.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) published a report on the economic impact of crashes for 2000 and found the following: In 2000, safety belt use saved about \$50 billion in medical care, lost productivity, and other injury related costs. Conversely, safety belt non-use cost society about \$26 billion (Cost categories included are medical costs, EMS, vocational rehabilitation, market productivity, household productivity, insurance administration, workplace costs, legal/court costs, and premature funeral costs).

I have attached to my testimony the results of a study done in Yellowstone County and a letter from Ray Kuntz who is the CEO of Watkins and Shepard and a Vice President of the American Trucking Associations. These facts and this letter bring the cost to society in Yellowstone County alone of non-use of seat belts. The study showed that unbelted occupants were 25 times more likely to die in a crash than unbelted passengers. Unbelted crash occupants accounted for 67% of the total inpatient hospital charges. These numbers clearly have a huge economic impact on insurance rates in Yellowstone County.

Last but not least you may ask why does the trucking industry care. No matter how much safety we practice we can only affect 30% of the truck car collisions as the passenger car cause 70% of these accidents. We understand that accidents will occur and we want to make sure that injuries and fatalities are kept as low as possible so that we can continue to provide health insurance and other benefits to our employees.

In closing Mr. Chairman and members of the committee I would like to remind you that it isn't the insurance companies that pay for these injuries and associated costs. It is the citizens of Montana who are paying for these through higher health costs, health insurance and increased work comp premiums. We need you to help us get relief from these added costs to society.

Please support SB 43

We need primary seatbelt law

By Ray Kuntz - IR Your Turn - 01/12/05

Soon the Montana Legislature will consider a primary enforcement seat belt law, a bill that clearly needs to be enacted. In the past when the bill was considered the main discussion has always been around individual rights and giving up any more of them to the government. I understand this side of the argument, but the social and economic cost of not passing the bill is just too high.

Several states have passed a primary enforcement law and we now have a proven record of accomplishment of increasing a state's safety belt use rate. States with primary laws have at least 11 percent higher use of seat belts. Good examples in the West are the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. All have passed primary laws and all are over 90 percent belt usage rates. Montana currently has about an 80 percent rate.

Here are some facts that need to be understood and considered.

An 11 percent increase in belt usage would result in about 40 less fatalities per year and a substantial reduction in severe injuries. The financial costs of the fatalities and injuries are high and drive up health, vehicle, and work comp insurance.

In 2003, almost 70 percent of Montana fatalities were not wearing a seat belt. Therefore, 20 percent of our non-belted drivers are experiencing 70 percent of the fatalities and unfortunately, a high percentage of them are teenagers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration published a report on the economic impact of crashes for 2000 and found the following: In 2000, safety belt use saved about \$50 billion in medical care, lost productivity, and other injury related costs. Belt non-use costs society about \$26 billion.

Yellowstone County did a study on crashes in their county in 2003 and found some alarming facts. Unbelted crash occupants were 25 times more likely to die in a crash and unbelted crash occupants were 7.3 times more likely to require inpatient hospitalization. The average charge for a belted inpatient was \$20,709 and average charge for an unbelted inpatient was \$48,691. Unbelted crash occupants accounted for 67 percent of the total inpatient hospital charges. Those numbers clearly have a huge economic impact on insurance costs in Yellowstone County.

Why is the trucking industry concerned about the primary enforcement bill? No matter how much safety we practice, we can only affect 30 percent of the truck-car collisions as the passenger vehicle causes 70 percent of these accidents. We understand that accidents are going to happen, and we want to make sure that the injuries and fatalities are kept as low as possible. Passing a primary enforcement seat belt law will do more to make our Montana highways safer than anything else we know about.

The costs of liability, worker's compensation and health insurance drove over 15,000 trucking companies into bankruptcy in the last three years. Our employees deserve more.

If the bill does not pass around 80 extra fatalities will happen in the next two years and one of them may be someone close to you.

RAY KUNTZ is the vice chairman for American Trucking Associations and the CEO and chairman for Watkins and Shepard Trucking.

2003 CRASH FACTS

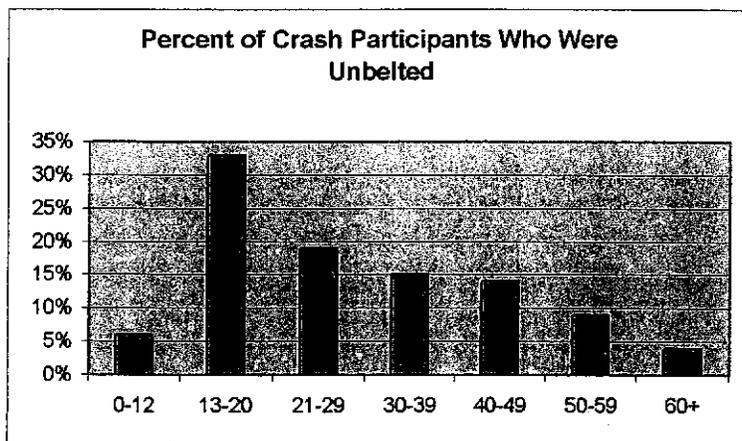
Yellowstone County CODES Project

Failure to "buckle up" contributes to more fatalities than any other traffic safety related behavior

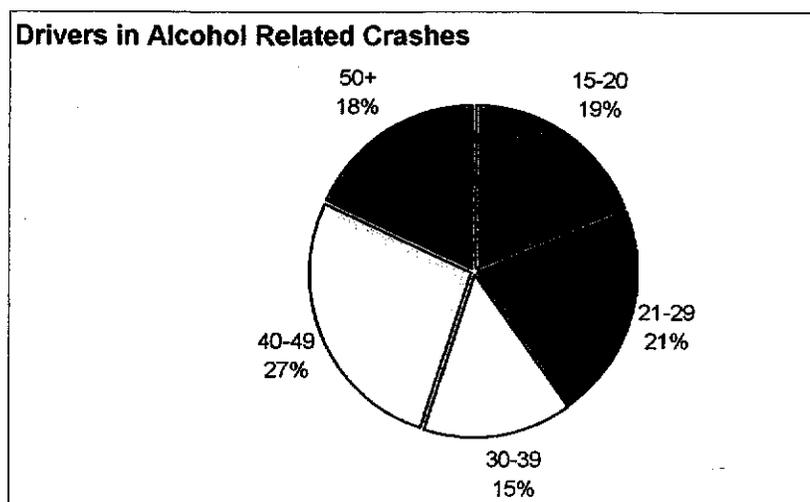
Compared to belted crash occupants, unbelted crash occupants were 25 times more likely to die in a crash.

Unbelted crash occupants in Yellowstone County were 7.3 times more likely to require inpatient hospitalization and 2 times more likely to require emergency department care than those who were belted.

The average charge for a **belted** inpatient was \$20,709. The average charge for an **unbelted** inpatient was \$48,692.



Unbelted occupants accounted for 67% of the total inpatient hospital charges for persons involved in crashes.



76% of crash participants involved in Alcohol Related crashes were not wearing a seatbelt. Crash participants involved in Alcohol Related crashes accounted for 33% of total hospital charges.