

KS Seat Belt Use Hits All-Time High

The highest-ever percentage of buckled drivers and passengers in Kansas was recorded in 2014.

Kansas Transportation Secretary Mike King made the announcement of the increase in the observed seat belt rate today at an event at Kansas Highway Patrol Troop B headquarters in Topeka.

“Eighty-six percent of drivers and front seat passengers were buckled up. That’s a five percentage point increase from the previous year,” said Secretary King.

In 2003, a year after the observed seat belt rate was only 61 percent; Kansas implemented the safety campaign, “Click it. Or ticket.” which combines education and enforcement with the help of Kansas law enforcement agencies.

Speaking on behalf of Kansas law enforcement, Kansas Highway Patrol Colonel Mark Bruce said the future of safety is moving in the right direction.

“This tells us that we are doing something right,” Col. Bruce said. We are seeing progress in the form of more people taking the initiative to protect themselves and buckle up.”

Law enforcement works with the KDOT-sponsored program, the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office (KTSRO), and uses their high school based education program, Seat belts Are For Everyone, or SAFE, to get the message to new drivers.

The SAFE program began in six high schools in Crawford County. Today it is in 128 schools in 60 counties, and reaches more than 100,000 students, according to KTSRO project director Norraine Wingfield. SAFE is a cooperative effort to highlight the importance of wearing seat belts and decrease risky driving behaviors of teens.

Wingfield said the observed teen rate for seat belt usage has been increasing at a greater rate than any other age group, and counties that have the SAFE program increased the seat belt rate for all ages.

“This shows that when drivers are buckled up, the occupants of the car are buckled up,” Wingfield said.

Secretary King pointed out that today’s announcement was worth celebrating but the national average for seat belt usage is 87%.

“We still have 14% of our state’s population going unbuckled,” Secretary King said. “That’s far too many. We will keep working to educate and enforce Kansas law.

“The message is simple. Seat belts save lives.”

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