



Louisiana State Police Troop C

“Common Misconceptions about Seatbelt Use”

“Why are the police so intent on writing seatbelt tickets?”

That is one question that many law enforcement officials hear throughout their career. There is one reason and one reason only, because they protect not only the driver, but other passengers inside that vehicle. Here you will read not only the excuses that we, as Louisiana State Troopers, hear on a daily basis, but also answers to these excuses.

Louisiana State Police Troop C covers five parishes including Assumption, Lafourche, Terrebonne, and the west banks of St. James and St. John the Baptist. Although Troop C does not contain any large metropolitan areas, we still investigate our fair share of traffic fatalities. In 2001 Troop C Troopers investigated 41 fatal crashes where 49 of our loved ones died tragically and needlessly. Of those killed in traffic crashes in the Troop C area, 67% were not wearing their seatbelt or were not properly buckled in at the time of the crash. Many people do not realize that when one crashes, there isn't just one “crash.” There are actually three separate collisions which occur. To read more about this, scroll to the end of the page for an explanation.

“I’m just going around the corner, so I don’t need my seatbelt.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. 85% of crashes occur within 5 miles from the driver’s residence. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, we live here; therefore, it makes sense that we do the majority of our driving in and around our area of residence. Second, drivers tend to become complacent when driving on roadways that are very familiar. Drivers are creatures of habit. Think of how you drive in another area where you’ve never driven. Drivers tend to pay more attention to the roadway when they are NOT familiar with it.

“If I wear my seatbelt, I will be trapped if my vehicle ends up in a bayou.”

In regards to the above question, there are some misconceptions regarding cars crashing in the bayou. When a vehicle strikes the water, it has the same impact as hitting a stationary wall. If you are not wearing your seatbelt, you are more likely to be thrown around the inside of the cab where you can be knocked unconscious (even when traveling at low speeds). If you are unconscious, then you definitely will be trapped inside. Seatbelts are not electric, so there is no danger of a “short” in the system should water come into contact with it. Once you become used to wearing a seatbelt, it becomes second nature to reach down and unbuckle yourself.

“Wearing my seatbelt is uncomfortable.”

Seatbelts are designed not only for your safety but for your comfort as well. Seatbelts are designed to allow you to reach for some things while driving your car. If the item you need will distract you from driving, it is safer to pull off to the side of the road, or have a passenger reach it for you. Again, once you become used to wearing a seatbelt, it not only becomes second nature to put it on, but it actually feels uncomfortable not to wear one.

“I’m a good driver.”

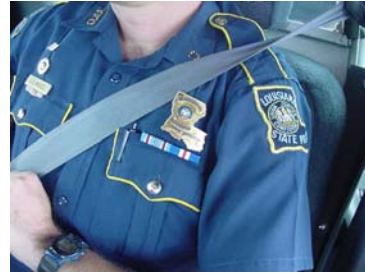
Even the best drivers in the world are smart enough to wear their seatbelts. Race car drivers have the best training for what they do. They also race on the best of road surfaces and in the most optimal of weather (often stopping when it does rain). We, on the other hand, drive in all types of weather and on different types of road surfaces. The most important thing to remember is that you never know when you’ll be involved in a crash. You don’t wake up in the morning, look at your calendar, and say “Ok, today is the day I get in my crash.” It is always easier (and less painful) to be prepared every time you ride in a vehicle.

“My car has an air bag.”

Air bags are SUPPLEMENTAL RESTRAINT SYSTEMS. This means that to achieve the most benefits from the air bag, you must ALSO use your seatbelt. In a crash an unbuckled occupant could bounce off the airbag and be thrown about the inside of the vehicle, much like a pinball in a pinball machine.

In short there are no valid excuses for not wearing a seatbelt. It takes less than 3 seconds to click in. Once you click in, be sure that you are wearing it properly. Make sure that your lap belt is placed across the strongest portion of your hips. Your shoulder

strap should fit between (not on) your neck and end of your shoulder. Your job is not yet complete. Once you've positioned the seatbelt where you want it, make sure that it is snug across your body. This is very simple to do, just grab your shoulder strap and pull it up toward the roof. A loose belt could allow the human body to slide underneath it. By the time the lap belt finally begins to restrain, it has already moved up onto the stomach where there is only flesh and internal organs to stop it. This can cause internal damage and can oftentimes be fatal.



For every crash (be it very minor or very serious) there are three separate collisions. They are the Vehicle Collision, the Human Collision, and the Internal Collision. Let's look at these.

The Vehicle Collision – This is exactly what it sounds like, a vehicle striking an object. During a collision, a vehicle will come to a violent and sudden stop. If you are traveling at 50 mph and hit a tree, your vehicle will come to a complete stop in a split second. At 30 mph, a vehicle hitting a stationary object will crumple inward about two feet. As the vehicle crushes, it absorbs some of the forces of the collision.

The Human Collision – At the moment of impact, the occupants are still traveling at the vehicle's speed. When the vehicle stops, the occupants continue to be hurled forward until they make contact with some part of the car. They will strike the steering wheel, dashboard, front window, or back of the front seat. Occupants can also collide with each other, with great force and cause serious injury. Remember "*Newton's Law*"? This is a prime example of *Newton's Law*. Objects in motion will stay in motion until acted upon by opposite forces. This is a rule, not an exception, in car crashes.

The Internal Collision – In a crash, even after the human body has come to a stop, its internal organs are still moving. Suddenly these internal organs slam into other organs or the skeletal system. This "Internal Collision" is what often causes serious injury or death.

Wearing a seatbelt is one of the most safety conscious choices one can make while in a vehicle. It only takes about three seconds to put on a seatbelt. Children are vulnerable to the seatbelt issues also. They simply do not have the experience or knowledge of what happens in a crash. It is our responsibility, whether as parents,

grandparents, caretakers, or the driver of a vehicle with a child inside, to ensure that they are as safe as possible anywhere and everywhere we travel. Children are very observant. They tend to act upon what they see. If for no other reason, wear your seatbelt, for your children. Many excuses are heard for not wearing a seatbelt, but simply put - there are NO EXCUSES!