



STATE OF DELAWARE
OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY
P.O. BOX 1321
DOVER, DELAWARE 19903-1321
302-672-7642
www.ohs.delaware.gov

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Andrea Summers
Community Relations Officer
672-7642 (w) 943-7293 (c)

Are More People Buckling Up? Fewer Tickets Issued for Seat Belt Violations During 2009 Click It or Ticket Campaign
Statewide seat belt surveys to begin Sunday May 31st

Dover - Over the past two weeks, nearly 2,000 drivers received traffic citations when police discovered that either they or their passengers were not buckled up. Officers from approximately 30 State, County, and municipal law enforcement agencies issued a total of 1,973 citations to unbuckled motorists during the 2009 Click It or Ticket campaign. The enforcement portion of the campaign ran from May 10th through Memorial Day and involved traffic safety checkpoints and saturation patrols both day and night.

For the second year in a row officers participating in Click It or Ticket issued fewer seat belt citations than the year before. In 2008, officers issued 2,347 citations - 374 more than they issued this year. Office of Highway Safety (OHS) officials are hoping that once again this means good news.

“Seat belts save lives and we hope this means that more people are actively taking part in this life saving behavior,” said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Office of Highway Safety. “Wearing a seat belt is the simplest thing you can do to improve your chances of surviving a crash by as much as 50%.”

Delaware’s current statewide seat belt usage rate is 91%. OHS officials will begin determining if there has been any increase in the state’s belt usage rate by conducting a series of observational seat belt surveys at locations throughout Delaware. Office of Highway Safety staff will survey motorists on roads at 82 sites throughout the state and record whether drivers and passengers are wearing seat belts. Motorists on all types of roadways from interstates to two-lane roads will be observed. Survey results should be available by early July.

Even if seat belt use does increase, OHS officials remained concerned about the lack of seat belt use in fatal crashes. Since January 1st, 70% of all drivers and passengers killed in vehicle crashes in the First State were not wearing seat belts. Many of them died in crashes that were the result of speeding or impaired driving.

That's why during the Click It or Ticket enforcement period, officers statewide were also on the lookout for aggressive and impaired drivers, who by the very nature of their risky behavior are less likely to wear seat belts. Between May 10th and May 25th, officers arrested 15 people for DUI, issued 5 citations for underage drinking violations, and cited another 466 drivers for speeding.

Additionally, officers issued 82 citations to drivers for child restraint violations, apprehended 44 wanted individuals, made 27 drug arrests, 3 felony arrests, seized 2 weapons, and issued 880 citations for a variety of other traffic violations.

"While accomplishing our primary goal of working to get more people buckled up, we also arrested dozens of other dangerous drivers who posed a potential threat to public safety. Traffic enforcement truly is real law enforcement work," said Roberts.

Seat belt use has increased dramatically since Delaware began conducting the Click It or Ticket campaign in 2002. At that time the statewide seat belt use rate was at just 68% but has risen by an amazing 23% percentage points in just seven years. Click It or Ticket is a nationwide seat belt enforcement and awareness campaign aimed at saving lives by increasing the number of people who consistently buckle up.

Delaware's campaign began on May 4 with awareness messages airing statewide on T.V., radio, the internet, in print and on billboards. Additionally, educational materials were distributed to businesses, schools, and trauma centers statewide.

Click It or Ticket is the first of three traffic safety campaigns under the state's summertime safety enforcement and awareness initiative, "120 Days of Summer HEAT" (Highway Enforcement of Aggressive Traffic). The Summer Heat campaign is a four month long crackdown on traffic violators in Delaware coordinated by the state Office of Highway Safety.

For more information on the "Click It or Ticket" campaign or any of the Office of Highway Safety's traffic safety initiatives, visit our website at www.ohs.delaware.gov.

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