

Manitoba well below national average when it comes to seatbelt use

If you don't want to shake and rattle when you roll, buckle up for safety before you go

Buckle Up for Safety!" is a little sing-song refrain my wife and I annoy our son with while we strap him in to the high chair, the stroller and, of course, his child car seat.

I suppose it's something we keep in mind for ourselves, too, when we get behind the wheel, as we are both diligent about wearing our seatbelts. In fact, I feel extremely uncomfortable - exposed in some way - if I'm not buckled in.

That's why I find it so surprising that Manitoba has one of the lowest seatbelt usage rates in all of Canada. How could that be, after years of countless campaigns hammering home how your safety is dramatically improved by simply buckling up? What didn't sink in?

In 1995, an estimated 54 deaths, 300 major and 1,392 minor injuries in Manitoba were associated with seatbelt non-use. At least half of these were senseless injuries and deaths. It's a proven fact. Seatbelt usage reduces



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your risk of serious injury or death by 50 per cent. OK, non-users, that should be enough convincing right there. But I'll go on, just in case.

Manitoba's seatbelt wearing rate in 1999 was 87 per cent. That's pretty dismal, and significantly below the national average of 92 per cent, wouldn't you say? Our rural wearing rates are particularly low, which is ironic, indeed. You see, a lot of rural accidents result from drivers losing control on gravel, and all too many deaths result when drivers are tossed from these vehicles as they roll. The seatbelt - the same one rural drivers, in particular, disdain - would lessen their risk in a uniquely rural accident.

Cut your risk in half

How's this for a sobering fact? If you are under 40, chances are if you're going to die, you're going to die in a car accident. If you wear a seatbelt, you cut those chances in half.

Still not convinced? In 1995, all seven paraplegic claims reported to MPI involved drivers and passengers who were not wearing seatbelts at the time of their single-vehicle collisions. It must be heart wrenching for these people and their families to know that a simple "click" before driving away may have prevented the devastating consequences.

Research indicates that males aged 18 to 45 are the worst demographic group of drivers for not wearing seatbelts. As well, police reports and surveys indicate that light trucks (pickups) are the most common vehicles driven by non-users. Do you recognize yourself here, or recognize someone you know?

Studies show that 25 to 45-year-old non-users have a more hardened

attitude towards non-use and are not likely to be easily swayed in their behaviour. Their primary source of influence is family and loved ones.

Seatbelt "intervention"

OK. Attention family and loved ones of non-users: this one's for you. Cut this column out, hand it to your resident seatbelt rebel, tell them you love them (even though they're obviously as stubborn as mules!) and you want to keep them alive awhile. This is no joke; remind them they're taking a ridiculous risk - doubling their risk of serious injury or death - simply because of their single-minded refusal to change their minds!

On the other hand, 18 to 24 year-olds generally understand and realize the importance of wearing seatbelts, but often forget to wear them or are simply negligent. This group is more likely to be swayed by peers and social norms. Translation: Calling all girlfriends of 18 to 24 year-old males (the predominant forgetful bunch). Remind them to buckle up every time

you get in a car with them. Trust me, no one has more influence over 18 to 24-year-old men than 18 to 24-year-old women.

The excuses for not wearing a seatbelt are many and varied, I'm sure. I heard my personal favourite from a friend of mine, a police officer. He said the dumbest excuse he was ever handed was from a muscled young guy he had originally pulled over for speeding:

"Sorry officer, I can't wear my seatbelt because I just worked out and my pecs hurt too much."

I am not making this up.

That's it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.