

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT seat belt use

**Myth: Wearing a seat belt is a personal decision that doesn't affect anyone else.**

**Fact:** Not wearing a seat belt can affect your loved ones. It can also affect other motorists since wearing a safety belt can help you avoid losing control of your vehicle in a crash.<sup>1</sup>

**Myth: If I'm only driving a short distance, I don't need to buckle up.**

**Fact:** The majority of fatal crashes occur within a 25 mile radius of home and at speeds of less than 40 mph.

**Myth: Seat belts are not necessary for low-speed driving.**

**Fact:** In a frontal collision at 30 mph, the vehicle hits an object (another vehicle, tree, etc.) and stops. Unrestrained people and objects inside the vehicle continue to move forward until they hit the windshield, steering column, dashboard, roof of the vehicle, etc., at about 30 mph. This is the same velocity a person falling from the top of a three-story building would experience upon impact with the ground.

**Myth: It is better to be thrown clear in the event of a crash.**

**Fact:** An occupant of a vehicle is four times more likely to be killed when thrown from the vehicle.

**Myth: Seat belts prevent your escape from a burning or submerged vehicle.**

**Fact:** Seat belts can keep you from being knocked unconscious, improving your chances of escape. Fire or submersion occurs in just ½ of 1% of all crashes—and the greatest danger is with the impact that precedes the fire or submersion in water.

**Myth: Good drivers don't need to wear seat belts.**

**Fact:** You are responsible for the mistakes of others as well as your own. Good drivers usually don't cause collisions, but during your life you are likely to be involved in a crash caused by another driver, bad weather, mechanical failure or a tire blowout. Wearing a seat belt prevents injuries and fatalities, reduces the chances of ejection, and helps protect your head and spinal cord from impact damage.

**Myth: It's more important to buckle up in the front seat.**

**Fact:** In a crash, seat belts keep rear-seat passengers from becoming projectiles, increasing the risk of injury or death to other occupants—including those buckled up—by 40%.<sup>2</sup> In a frontal crash with a passenger behind the driver, unbelted rear seat passengers increase the risk of fatality among belted drivers by 137% compared to belted rear-seat passengers.<sup>3</sup>

**Myth: I have an air bag to protect me—that's good enough.**

**Fact:** Seat belts keep you in the proper position to benefit from the deployment of an air bag. If you are not wearing your seat belt, you could slide under the airbag or be thrown into a rapidly opening frontal airbag; a movement of such force could injure or even kill you. In addition, airbags will not help in rear impact or rollover crashes.

**Myth: It takes too much time to fasten your seat belt 20 times a day.**

**Fact:** Buckling up takes 2-3 seconds. Even buckling up 20 times a day requires a minute or less. It takes only an instant to die or become permanently injured in the event of a crash.

**Myth: Seat belts can hurt you in a crash.**

**Fact:** Properly worn, seat belts seldom cause injuries. If they do, it is usually in the form of a surface bruise but any resulting injury is generally far less severe than would have been the case without a seat belt. For the best protection, seat belts should be worn with the lap belt low and tight against your hips or pelvis, not your stomach. The shoulder belt should be snug across your chest, away from your neck. Never place the shoulder belt behind your back or under your arm.

<sup>1</sup>Many statements in this document are adapted from the manual "Increasing Safety Belt Use in Your Company" developed by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Belt Partnership under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, March 2006. Unless noted otherwise, all other statistics are from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

<sup>2</sup>MacLennan, P.A.; McGwin, Jr., G.; Metzger, J.; Moran, S.G.; and Rue III, L.W. 2004. Risk of injury for occupants of motor vehicle collisions from unbelted occupants. *Injury Prevention* 10(6): 363-7.

<sup>3</sup>Bose, D.; Arregui-Dalmases, C.; Sanchez-Molina, D.; Velazquez-Amejjide, J.; and Crandall, J. 2013. Increased risk of driver fatality due to unrestrained rear-seat passengers in severe frontal crashes. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 53:100-4.