



## **Primary Safety Belt Laws Improve Safety and Reduce the Economic Impact of Crashes**

### **Overview**

Wyoming has the second lowest safety belt use in the country, with just 68.6 percent of people wearing safety belts, and below the national average of 83 percent in 2008. In fact, the usage rate in Wyoming went *down* in 2008 compared to a 72.2 percent usage rate the previous year. In 2007, 61 percent of all people who died in Wyoming traffic crashes were unbelted. With implementation of a primary safety belt law enabling increased enforcement, safety belt use would increase and the detrimental impacts to safety and the economy would decrease.

### *The Benefits of a Primary Belt Law*

It is estimated a primary belt law would increase safety belt use from 67.6% to over 80% -- a 13 percent increase. The result is more lives saved and a financial benefit for all Wyoming taxpayers. If a primary safety belt law were enacted, the State of Wyoming could expect to save at least \$2.6 million (\$1.6 million after reimbursement) from injuries prevented in 2010. The total savings to all payers would be more than \$20.9 million dollars.

### **Problem/Issue**

There are two types of belt laws. Primary or "standard enforcement" seat belt laws allow police officers to enforce a violation of a seat belt law after observing a belt use infraction by itself. That is, the police can treat a seat belt violation as they would any other violation. Secondary laws prevent police from enforcing the belt law unless it is observed in association with another violation. That is, if the belt violation is the only visible infraction, police are not allowed to enforce the law in a secondary law state. In Wyoming, the seat belt law is a secondary enforcement law. Drivers who are not buckled up during a traffic stop are subject to a fine of \$25. Unrestrained passengers are subject to a \$10 fine.

There are real financial costs to taxpayers of a secondary law that are reflected in rising Medicaid and other state medical expenditures, higher health insurance costs for residents, and more burden on insurance companies and state and local governments

For Wyoming corporations, transportation fatalities are a serious issue. Of workplace fatalities, 65 percent are transportation related.

In Wyoming, the type of fatal crash that occurs most often is the overturn, with 24.4% occupants ejected and 6.8% partially ejected in 2007. Use of a safety belt can have a significant impact on preventing ejection and reducing the extent of injury in this type of crash.

### **Understanding the Strategy**

States with stronger primary belt enforcement laws exhibit higher use rates than those with weaker laws. Higher safety belt usage rates would reduce the severity of crashes, saving lives and reducing the extent of injuries. This would have a significant impact on reducing the cost burdens that result from severe crashes, including wages and productivity loss; medical expenses; administrative expenses (public and private); motor vehicle damage including property damage; and employer costs for crashes involving workers.

### **Conclusion**

Passage of a primary safety belt law would provide significant safety and economic benefits to the state of Wyoming.

### **Resource**

Estimated Medical Cost Savings in Wyoming by Implementing A Primary Seat Belt Law, Final Report, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, January 2010.