

SAFE Campaign Kicking Off

Troopers Join Seatbelt Enforcement Campaign Near Kansas High Schools

Enforcement will run during February and March

Beginning February 24, and running through March 7, 2014, the Kansas Highway Patrol will participate in an annual seatbelt enforcement campaign around area high schools. The SAFE initiative (Seatbelts Are For Everyone) is a program administered by the students of the high school they attend. Currently, 54 counties totaling 124 schools participate in the program statewide.

In 2012, according to Kansas Department of Transportation statistics, Kansas tragically lost 43 teens in vehicle crashes, 74% of whom were not properly restrained. The KDOT Bureau of Transportation Safety and Technology is hosting this two-week awareness campaign in hopes of decreasing that number, and increasing seatbelt usage. KDOT and law enforcement partners across the state have spent over 20 years educating Kansas teens on the dangers of driving without a seatbelt.

In 2013, the observed seat belt rate for the ages of 15-17 was 81%. To put this into perspective, the rate for the same age group was 61% in 2008-09. This program is making a difference for our youths.

"Troopers will be working with local law enforcement partners in an aggressive campaign focused around area schools to educate and enforce seat belt laws," said Colonel Ernest E. Garcia, Superintendent of the Patrol. "Seatbelts have been proven to save lives and prevent injuries and our goal is to make sure all young drivers buckle up."

For the two-week enforcement period, State Troopers and other law enforcement officers will be extra-vigilant when patrolling around schools. There should be no surprise when it comes to this enforcement initiative and officers will be targeting motorists who refuse to obey traffic laws. Anyone caught not properly restrained will be issued a citation.

The Following is Submitted by Brown County Sheriff John Merchant:

Beginning February 24 through March 7 the Brown County Sheriffs office, Horton and Hiawatha Police Departments and the Kansas Highway Patrol will participate in the statewide seat belt enforcement that focuses on teenage driver and occupant safety. These entities will be patrolling school zones in search of drivers and passengers who are not wearing seat belts. Citations will be issued to all drivers and passengers who are not wearing seat belts.

The purpose of this program is to educate the young driver and passengers on the importance of seat belt usage. Several weeks ago I reported on two roll over accidents involving teenage drivers in Brown County. Both walked away from these potentially deadly accidents. Both were reported wearing their seat belts. I am a firm believer that had neither driver been wearing their seat belt, we would have worked an accident involving a serious injury or fatality.

Statistics have proven that if you are involved in an accident you lessen your chance of becoming seriously injured or killed by over 70% just by wearing your seat belt. Our goal is to help provide safety incentives and interdictions to make sure teenage drivers and their passengers get the chance to grow up to be adults and enjoy a long healthy life.

Both Horton and Hiawatha schools have participate in the SAFE program for the last 4 years. SAFE stands for Seatbelts Are For Everyone and is mostly funded by the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office. Students sign pledge cards stating they will wear their seatbelts at all times, each month several names are drawn from the group of cards and students are awarded \$25 gift cards simply by wearing their seatbelts. If a student is issued a citation for not wearing their seatbelt they are ineligible for that months drawing. At the end of the year several grand prizes are awarded to students from both schools. This program is designed to provide positive peer pressure with the students and there have been many positive comments from the students, school personnel and parents. I have had a number of parents thank us for this program and commented that their students make it a point to let everyone know the importance of wearing seatbelts. If we can help save a life or prevent serious injury the program is well worth the effort.

I encourage anyone with questions, comments or concerns to speak with their local law enforcement agency.

Many Signals Communications