

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
March 11, 2011

“Safety belts save lives” is one of the truest statements used by safety officers today. Over the past several years, public awareness campaigns, enforcement mobilizations and testimonials have been used to increase the number of motorists who “buckle up.” In fact, statistics and surveys show safety belt usage has never been higher. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the use of safety belts saved over 13,000 lives last year. Police Officers see this fact in action every day but unfortunately witness too many crashes where safety belts were not used. If you’re involved in a motor vehicle crash, a safety belt could mean you’re one of those 13,000. Thanks to NHTSA, this week I’d like to cover the top 5 things you should know about “buckling up” before you start your next trip.

* Taking that brief moment to buckle your safety belt is the most effective thing you can do to protect yourself in a crash. Every once in awhile I hear from someone who defends the choice of not wearing a safety belt. The excuse given is, “I’ll put the belt on if I see a crash coming.” In all honesty, most crashes happen so quickly there’s no time to brake, let alone attach a safety belt. Also the odds of being trapped by a safety belt are much less than being injured in a crash when not wearing one.

* Air bags are meant to work with a safety belt, not in place of. If you are involved in a head-on crash with air bag activation, you will likely be seriously injured and turning the air bag off defeats the purpose of having one. Air bags and safety belts make vehicles safer than ever before but you’ve got to use them.

* Always be sure the safety belt is worn properly, to assure effectiveness and reduce injury. The shoulder belt should be placed across the middle of your chest and away from your neck. The lap belt should be positioned across your hips and below your stomach. Never place the shoulder belt behind your back or under an arm, this reduces the effectiveness of the belt.

* Before buying a new car, check to see that the belt fits properly and comfortably. Check with the dealer to assure the belts are adjustable, to accommodate other drivers or different clothing. If you have an older car with only a lap belt, inquire about having a proper belt installed.

* Finally, remember safety belts are for everyone, utilize the proper safety seat for younger children, be aware of using safety belts in special circumstances, such as during pregnancy and wear the belt on every trip. Most crashes happen within five miles of your home, so be prepared. In Amesbury, police typically respond to one or two crashes a day, so we certainly have our share. In bad weather, those numbers often increase and no street is immune. Safety belts and air bags save lives, perhaps yours one day but only if you use them.