



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?

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Why buckle up?

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You've heard it, seen it and read it a million times: "Buckle up."

Why won't this safety theme just go away since everybody's seen it their entire life? After all, most Soldiers in the Army today went home from the hospital in a car seat after they were born. So why do we keep hearing about the proper use of seat belts?

"Because it saves lives," said Lt. Col. Scott Wile, director, Driving Task Force, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. "Buckling up is one of the simplest things you can do to increase your chances of survival in the event you are in an accident."

In fiscal 2010, 54 percent of fatal accidents stemmed from some form of indiscipline, with the most common being speed and failure to wear seat belts.

As a reference, Army Regulation 385-10, paragraph 11-4.a, requires seat belt usage whenever a Soldier is in a vehicle, whether on or off the installation. However, Army safety officials report an increase in Soldier deaths that could have been prevented if seat belts were used.

In the case of a recent accident involving Soldiers of the same rank, it was found that neither one of them spoke up about buckling seat belts. If the senior occupant cannot be ascertained, the driver is responsible for ensuring seat belt compliance. However, when both Soldiers are passengers, it is a good practice to link the "take care of your battle buddy" mantra to seat belt compliance by stressing the importance of **SOMEBODY** in the vehicle ensuring everybody uses restraints.

In order to achieve 100 percent seat belt compliance, Soldiers need the “personal courage” to do the right thing and adhere to a higher standard of personal conduct. This can be done by developing an individual; second nature; privately-owned-vehicle “pre-combat check” mentality to address seat belt apathy and complacency, Wile said.

“Leaders need to set and stress the example for Soldiers to follow, always wear their seat belts, and take other steps to minimize risk as part of composite risk management,” he added. “Too many accident reports involve fatalities because they were in an accident and weren’t properly restrained. Many of them would be alive today if they simply had worn their seat belts.”

The nation’s top safety agencies trumpet the importance of seat belts, with the National Safety Council stating that while seat belt use averaged 88 percent in 2009 (up from 69 percent in 2008), teens, commercial drivers, males in rural areas, pick-up truck drivers, those who are driving at night and those who have been drinking tend not to wear them.

Also, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports seat belts are the most effective traffic safety device for preventing death and injury. The organization says wearing a seat belt can reduce the risk of crash injuries by 50 percent, and 75,000 people involved in vehicle accidents between 2004-2008 are alive today because they were buckled up.

Do you need another reason to use your seat belt, and make sure everyone in your vehicle is using them properly? The NHTSA tells us that 42 percent of passenger vehicle occupants who died in 2007 accidents were unbelted. A study by the group in 2009 estimated that 1,600 lives and 22,000 injuries could be prevented annually if seat belt use reached 90 percent, just a 2 percent jump from recent estimates. The trend is comparable to the recent trends in fiscal 2011 that showed two of six fatalities were unbelted passengers.

The numbers are overwhelming: **SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES**. That’s why the ‘Buckle Up’ message won’t be going away anytime soon.

For additional seat belt safety information, visit <http://www.nsc.org/Pages/Home>

