Nighttime Seat Belt Enforcement Funding Granted to Grays Harbor County Law Enforcement

Local News

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Grays Harbor County - Grays Harbor County Law Enforcement agencies have recently received a $13,000 grant from the Washington Traffic Safety Commission to conduct additional seat belt patrols this fall.

Part of the funding will support the upcoming Nighttime Seat Belt Emphasis patrols between **October 23 and November 8.** The remaining funding provides sustained seat belt patrols throughout Grays Harbor County.

Participating in the patrols are the **Grays Harbor County Sheriff’s Office, the Aberdeen, Cosmopolis, Elma, Hoquiam, Montesano, and Ocean Shores Police Departments, as well as the Washington State Patrol, with the support of the Grays Harbor County Target Zero Task Force.**

Seat belts reduce the risk of injury and death by about 70 percent when worn correctly. As seat belt use has increased during the years, traffic deaths and serious injuries have dropped, falling to 518 in 2008 from 649 in 2001 in Washington State.

“Law enforcement pull over unbuckled motorists all the time, but during these special emphasis patrols, officers are on the lookout for seat belt violators. The idea is to get motorists into the habit of buckling up so we can continue to reduce the death toll on our state’s highways,” said Lowell Porter, Washington Traffic Safety Commission Director.

For years, Washington has been one of the top states for seat belt use. During the last recorded observational survey during 2008 of about 100,000 Washington motorists, seat belt use stood at 96.5%.

Part of this high usage rate is because Washington has a primary enforcement seat belt law, so an officer can pull over a vehicle if a driver -- or passenger -- is not buckled up. If the unbuckled passenger is under age 16, the driver gets the ticket; if the unbuckled passenger is age 16 or older,

the passenger gets their own seat belt ticket.

A seat belt ticket in Washington State costs $124.

When a motorist is unbuckled, often they are ejected partially or completely from a vehicle. By wearing a seat belt, the risk of being ejected is reduced by 81% (Harborview). Nationally, during 2007 more than 14,000 people died in crashes while unbuckled. About half of these people would not have died had they been buckled up, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Medical costs from traffic crashes amount to more than $276 million each year. A research study conducted by Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center in Seattle found that an unbuckled motorist’s medical bills amount to $11,000 more per collision than that of a belted motorist, so improved seat belt use is not only saving lives, but also reducing medical costs from collisions.