

## Unbuckled deaths rise in 2011

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Despite a continuous decline in the number of people killed in traffic crashes in Colorado over the past decade, the number of people who died without seat belts increased for the first time since 2002. Last year, 187 drivers and passengers died unrestrained, up from 164 in 2010. This is the highest level since 2007 when 193 people died in crashes that were not buckled up.

Colorado's seat belt use rate has also stalled over the past five years. In 2011, 82 percent of observed drivers and passengers were wearing seat belts, compared to 81 percent in 2007.

In an effort to increase seat belt use and save lives across the state, the Colorado State Patrol and 72 law enforcement agencies are working overtime for the Click It or Ticket seat belt enforcement period, May 21-June 3.

"We've made progress in reducing the number of people killed on Colorado roadways, but we know more can be done to give people a fighting chance to survive a crash if we can convince them to wear a seat belt," said Colonel James Wolfenbarger, chief of the Colorado State Patrol. "Sometimes it takes a ticket to remind people about the importance of buckling up. Click It or Ticket is not popular, but we know seat belts save lives, and we'd rather issue citations than notify loved ones of a tragic death that could have been avoided with one simple click."

Those most at-risk of dying in a crash without a seat belt are young men, pickup truck occupants, nighttime drivers and passengers, Hispanics and those traveling in rural areas. Here are some statistics from 2011.

—Seventy-three percent of unbuckled deaths in Colorado were men. Nearly half of them were age 18-34.

—Pickup trucks are twice as likely to roll over in a crash.

—Sixty-seven percent of those killed in a pickup truck were not wearing a seat belt.

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—Nearly six out of 10 who died on rural roadways were not wearing a seat belt compared to three out of 10 in urban areas, or 34 percent.

—Sixty-seven percent of people killed in Colorado crashes at night were not wearing seat belts, compared to 53 percent during the day.

—Hispanics are over-represented in unrestrained fatalities, comprising 26 percent of unbuckled deaths in Colorado last year, despite making up 21 percent of the state's population.

Seat belt use saves thousands of lives in Colorado and across America each year. Statistics show that in 2010 alone, seat belts saved an estimated 12,546 lives nationwide, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

During last year's May Click It or Ticket enforcement period, 9,224 seat belt citations were written. To view seat belt citation results by agency after the enforcement period, visit [www.seatbeltscolorado.com](http://www.seatbeltscolorado.com)

Colorado has a secondary enforcement law for adult drivers and front-seat passengers. Drivers can be ticketed for violating the seat belt law if they are stopped for another traffic violation. Click It or Ticket enforcement focuses on speeding and aggressive drivers. Drivers who are stopped for a traffic violation and are not using a seat belt will be ticketed. Seat belt fines are \$65 per violation.

Colorado's child-passenger safety law and its teen driver seat belt law are primary enforcement, meaning the driver can be stopped and ticketed if an officer sees an unrestrained or improperly restrained child in the vehicle or if a teen driver and their passengers are not buckled up. The public can find more information about the law at [www.seatbeltscolorado.com](http://www.seatbeltscolorado.com) and [www.carseatscolorado.com](http://www.carseatscolorado.com)

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Holyoke Enterprise May 31, 2012