



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Seat belt usage highest ever reported; child restraint slightly down in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More Alabamians than ever are buckling up according to 2004 survey results. The seat belt usage rate was a reported 80 percent, as compared to 77 percent in 2003. This marks the highest seat belt usage rate ever, eclipsing the next highest rate of 79 percent reported in 2002. The child restraint usage rate in 2004 was 83 percent, down from 87 percent in 2003.

"We are excited about the unprecedented seat belt usage rate. Many partners have worked together to improve passenger safety in the state, and will continue to do so in the future. We are especially concerned about the decline in child restraint usage and more efforts will be made in the upcoming year to increase that rate," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer.

Using guidelines required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the study observed 64,279 front seat occupants in 15 selected counties. The counties with the highest seat belt usage rates were Jefferson and Tuscaloosa, both with 83 percent. The lowest seat belt rate was reported in Escambia County at 73 percent.

Shelby County had the highest child restraint rate at 87 percent, while the lowest rate was reported in Blount County with 75 percent.

Organizations such as the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Children's Health System, Alabama Department of Transportation, Alabama Department of Public Safety and the Alabama Department of Public Health have collaborated to increase passenger safety in the state through educational and enforcement efforts.

Through Alabama's "Click-it-or-Ticket" campaign state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies conduct massive enforcement of the state's safety belt laws, including public safety checkpoints.

To ensure that children are properly restrained, 19 permanent inspection sites are located statewide with certified child passenger safety specialists and instructors to assist parents in the correct installation of car seats. These stations are funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

Key legislation also contributed to the efforts of enforcing restraint and protecting children in the state. The Primary Seat Belt Law was enacted in 1999 and changed the previous 1991 Seat Belt Law making failure to use safety belts a primary offense. In 1989 the Car Seat Law raised the age of children required to use a child passenger restraint system to 6 years old.

For more information on seat belts and child restraint, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at www.adph.org/injuryprevention. To find a local inspection site please call 1-800- 504-9768.

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