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May 13, 2015

News contact: Gary Herman (785) 296-3618; gherman@ksdot.org;
Ann Williamson (785) 296-3585; cell (785) 806-1205;
annw@ksdot.org

“Click it. Or ticket.” means added enforcement in Kansas

Not everyone can remember a single bad decision, but Sarah Snyder can.

“The absolute worst decision I’ve ever made,” Snyder said. “Not buckling my seat belt before we started driving around.”

Snyder spoke at a press conference Wednesday morning at the Wichita Police Department announcing the added enforcement for the annual “Click it. Or ticket.” period in Kansas. Beginning Monday, May 18 through Sunday, May 31 drivers can expect an increased law enforcement presence checking for people wearing seat belts.

In high school Snyder went out with friends one night, riding around in a convertible without her seat belt on. The car crashed, throwing Snyder from the vehicle and leaving her paralyzed. Before her crash she would only wear her seat belt when she was with her parents, and if her friends weren’t wearing theirs she wouldn’t either.

“There is one thing that makes me very sad to this day,” Snyder said. “It’s knowing that my injury is 100 percent preventable. If I would have taken the three seconds to buckle up, I wouldn’t be here speaking today.”

Unfortunately, Sarah’s story is a common one, according to Dr. James Haan, Medical Director of Trauma Services at Via Christi Hospital.

He recently treated a patient who was not wearing his seat belt and was thrown through a windshield during the crash; he is now living at a nursing home full time.

“This young man’s story really stands out to me because not only is his life completely ruined but so was his family’s,” Haan said. “If he had worn his seat belt, the outcome would have most certainly been much more positive.”

Haan said this story, and Snyder’s, are tragic examples of people not wearing seat belts, and the traumatic injuries that could be prevented if they only took the extra time to put on their seat belts.

“Please tell everyone to buckle up,” Haan said.

During the next few weeks law enforcement will be working overtime to rigorously enforce Kansas’ seat belt law because it saves lives.

“We’re doing extra enforcement because anything less than 100 percent seat belt usage is unacceptable,” said Capt. Gavin Seiler, Acting Deputy Chief of the Wichita Police Department. “In Kansas we can, and will, pull you over for not wearing a seat belt. When we do, we will give you a ticket and you will pay a fine.”

Seiler said law enforcement will be focusing on three areas: extra enforcement at night, young people and those driving pickup trucks.

“I’d rather have you mad at me for giving you a ticket,” Seiler said. “Than having to tell your family and your kids that you’re in the ER or that you died in a crash.”

KDOT Traffic Safety Manager Chris Bortz pointed out that seat belt use is at an all-time high in Kansas, an observed rate of 86 percent in 2014, up from 61 percent in 2003. The 2014 national observed rate was 87 percent.

“Through education and enforcement, we have been able to make significant strides in getting more people to wear their seat belt,” Bortz said. “We are heading in the right direction, but there’s still quite a bit of work to do before we reach our goal of 100 percent usage.

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