

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Extra enforcement of state seat belt laws planned this month across Kansas

Two years ago Shelby Feugate was a 20-year-old who never wore her seat belt.

“I thought they were uncomfortable and I just didn’t like them,” Feugate said. “I never thought I’d get into a crash.”

Feugate spoke from a wheelchair Wednesday at a Kansas Department of Transportation news conference at the Shawnee Police Department. Feugate says she never wore a seat belt until after the crash that cost the use of her legs. In 2012, a car she was driving was struck by another vehicle on the passenger side. The other driver was wearing a seat belt and walked away; Feugate suffered a spinal cord injury that made her a paraplegic.

“I went to a rehabilitation center for two months to learn how to live life in a wheelchair,” Feugate said. “What I miss most about my life before is being spontaneous. Now I have to plan everything in advance, even just to go out.”

In May, the Kansas Highway Patrol and sheriffs and police departments across Kansas will be working overtime to catch drivers who are not buckled up.

“Given the choice between a crash death notification and writing a seat belt ticket, any law officer would much prefer the latter,” said Shawnee Police Sgt. Jim Baker. “Making a death notification is one of the hardest parts of being an officer, especially when simply buckling up would have saved a life.”

The extra enforcement is part of a larger, national *Click It or Ticket* mobilization that runs May 19 – June 1.

“Memorial Day weekend kicks off the summer vacation season, and we want everyone to arrive alive,” Baker said. “Just buckle up, or you will receive a ticket.”

Kansas law allows that law enforcement officers can stop any vehicle simply for a seat belt violation. No other violation needs be observed. Baker said enforcement will focus on younger motorists, pickup trucks and nighttime motorists. National statistics show crash fatalities in these categories are more likely to be related to failure to wear seat belts than other categories.

Jenny Scheve, a former trauma nurse who now speaks for ThinkFirst of Kansas City, an injury prevention program, says the biggest challenges with unbelted crash survivors are head and spinal cord injuries.

“The body cannot regenerate damaged brain or spine cells,” Scheve said. “Crash victims who were not wearing a seat belt are the most difficult cases, medically for the treatment staff and emotionally for family and friends. Lives are changed.”

Chris Bortz, KDOT Traffic Safety manager, said Kansans are below the national average in seat belt use. In 2012 Kansas had a 79.5 percent usage rate, which is 39th in the country, compared with 86 percent in the rest of the United States.

“To save lives, we’ve created a new message that Kansans will see on television and online,” Bortz said. “The message emphasizes that you will be stopped and you will get a ticket if you don’t wear a seat belt. In Kansas it’s the law. Click it or ticket.”

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Note to editors and reporters: The new Kansas video message can be viewed at:
<http://youtu.be/mdh0UXUMmg8>.

This information can be made available in alternative accessible formats upon request.
For information about obtaining an alternative format, contact the Bureau of Transportation Information, 700 SW Harrison St., 2nd Fl West, Topeka, KS 66603-3754 or phone 785-296-3585 (Voice)/Hearing Impaired – 711.

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