

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Seatbelts Provide 'Room to Live'

Crash victim, law enforcement officials describe life-saving potential of seatbelts at KDOT "Click it. Or ticket." enforcement crackdown statewide media event

KANSAS CITY, KAN. – Seatbelts keep people in a safe space within a vehicle that can prevent serious injuries and save lives, a brain-injured crash victim and law enforcement officials said during the kickoff of the annual "Click It. Or Ticket" enforcement crackdown in Kansas.

"My parents looked at my car after the crash," said Chad Kitzman, 29, who more than five years ago suffered traumatic brain injury in a one-car crash. "It looked like a tin can crushed into a ball from rolling end over end down a hill. When they looked into the vehicle where I had been sitting, that part of the car was totally intact. I would have been protected had I just fastened my seatbelt."

Kansas Highway Patrol Capt. Dek Kruger described his personal experience in notifying a woman that her husband and two sons had just died in a rollover crash. None were wearing seatbelts.

"There was room to live in that vehicle," Capt. Kruger said. "In the past three years, I have responded to and investigated 50 fatality crashes involving 58 victims. Twenty-nine of those victims were not wearing seatbelts. Twenty-nine husbands, wives, sons and daughters that did not have to die. There was room to live in those vehicles, too."

Kitzman, Kruger and Master Sergeant Gary Todd of the Kansas City, Kan., Police Department spoke at a May 12 statewide media event announcing the state's "Click it. Or ticket" seatbelt

enforcement initiative. Law enforcement officers statewide will be working overtime to enforce the state's seatbelt law before and after the Memorial Day holiday.

Master Sergeant Todd explained that Kansas law requires everyone in a vehicle to be properly restrained, and officers will issue citations to violators.

Todd thanked residents of his community for wearing seatbelts and described the success in Wyandotte County of a statewide program – Seat Belts are for Everyone, or SAFE – that provided positive peer reinforcement in high schools. But Kansas is still below the national average of 85 percent seatbelt usage, he said.

Capt. Kruger described in detail a death notification visit he made in 2004.

“There are some memories that never fade,” he said. “How do you tell a wife and mother that her husband and both of her sons have just been killed? I can still see every detail as if it just happened a moment ago.”

“As all the police officers in this room can tell you, making death notifications is the absolute worst part of law enforcement,” Capt. Kruger added.

Kruger said, “For my part and on behalf of all troopers of the Kansas Highway Patrol, we will continue to vigorously enforce restraint laws. If you can't buckle up for yourself, then do it for the people who would be subjected to a death notification from a Kansas Trooper.”

Kitzman described his experience in detail, even as he conceded he had no recollection of the crash, his two months in a coma or many months in hospitals and rehabilitation recovering.

“The details that I am sharing with you are from family and the police at the scene,” he said.

“Today, I can no longer drive because of the damage to my brain and optic nerves,” Kitzman said. “I have to rely on my parents and family to drive me anywhere I need to go. My friends have all moved on with their lives, and I no longer have any contact with them. I am no longer the person that they once knew.”

Kitzman added that statistics show that on average, an individual will be in four car crashes in a lifetime.

“Assuming that your next car ride could be one of those four times, you should make sure that you always buckle up, and avoid what happened to me,” he said. “Whenever you are in a car, riding or driving, you should always buckle up.”

Note to editors: Photos and video of the news conference and prepared remarks are available for your use. To obtain, contact Natalie Payn at Trozzolo Communications Group, 816-842-8111 or npayn@trozzolo.com.

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