

For immediate release
August 10, 2010
785.368.8500

Amy Jordan Wooden, Press Secretary

Governor Parkinson highlights benefits of Kansas primary seat belt law

Law to save Kansas lives, health costs

Seat belt use is on the rise in Kansas – a fact that Governor Mark Parkinson celebrated at a news conference in Topeka this morning where Kansas received nearly \$11.2 million in connection with passage of the primary seat belt law.

“It is an indisputable fact that using seat belts saves lives and reduces injuries in vehicle crashes,” said Parkinson. “While we look forward to the benefits these federal funds will provide our state budget and our public safety programs, more importantly, we look forward to the Kansas lives that will be saved as a result of this legislation. I appreciate the hard work and persistence of the legislature in finally getting this law passed and for giving our law enforcement officers an important tool on the road.”

The new Kansas law enables police officers to stop and ticket the driver of any passenger car if either the driver or front seat passenger is observed not wearing a seat belt. This law also applies to anyone under the age of 18. Previously, officers could only ticket violators if the driver was stopped for another traffic infraction.

Governor Parkinson and Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller were presented the federal funds by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Deputy Administrator Ronald Medford at the Kansas Department of Transportation’s Gage Maintenance Complex. State legislators, various first responder organizations and other public safety leaders also attended.

“First Responders are at the scene and all too often see the tragic consequences when seat belts are not used,” said Secretary Miller. “Buckle up when you get in a vehicle – every time you get in a vehicle – as we want to increase safety one click at a time across Kansas.”

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) guaranteed funding for highways, highway safety, and public transportation, including a financial incentive for states to pass a primary seat belt law. States must allocate \$1 million of this funding towards behavioral traffic safety activities while the remainder can be spent on highway improvement projects across Kansas.

With the passage of its primary belt law, Kansas is expected to increase its belt use by approximately nine percentage points, cut annual fatalities in passenger cars and light trucks by eight percent and reduce serious injuries throughout the state.

Kansas saw a nearly five percent increase in the seat belt usage rate as it increased from 77 percent in 2009 to 81.8 percent in 2010. Traffic crashes cost Kansas about \$1.9 billion each year in medical expenses, lost productivity, property damage and related costs. This amounts to about \$700 for every resident of the state, each year.

Kansas is the 31st state to pass a primary seat belt law which went into effect June 30.

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