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## **Enforcement blitz to focus on top 3 factors in fatal crashes**

Law enforcement agencies in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia will focus a safety blitz Sept. 10 through 23 on the three most common factors in deadly traffic crashes: speeding, driving under the influence of intoxicants and not using seatbelts. They also hope to educate parents and other caregivers about the changes to child passenger safety laws that took effect July 1.

“In Oregon, those are the three leading factors in fatal crashes – excessive speed, DUII and failure to use safety restraints,” said Carla Levinski, Passenger Restraint Program manager at the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Safety Division. “Ironically, every one of those factors is under drivers’ and passengers’ control – including using the proper restraints for children.”

The 2007 Oregon Legislature strengthened several provisions of law dealing with child passengers. A new requirement was added to keep infants riding rear facing in child seats until they reach both one year of age and 20 pounds in weight. Car seats are required for children weighing 40 pounds or less. Once a child reaches 40 pounds, they must be restrained in a booster seat until they are eight years old or reach 4’9” in height.

“During 2006 in Oregon, 1,354 child passengers under age eight were injured and six were killed in motor vehicle crashes,” Levinski said. “Two out of five of these children were not using child restraints. This means they were either using ill-fitting adult lap and shoulder belt systems or no restraints at all.”

In addition to the new child passenger requirements, the Legislature extended seat belt laws to include occupants of commercial vehicles that are “designed or used to transport property” such

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as vans, cars and pickup trucks used by delivery services or by many construction contractors. These vehicles will no longer be exempt as of effect Jan. 1, 2008.

The Three Flags Campaign, named for the two states (Oregon, Washington) and one Canadian province (British Columbia) that participate in the program, uses periodic enforcement blitzes and public information campaigns to promote safety on the road.

During 2006, Oregon compliance with safety belt laws ranked third among all states in the nation with 94 percent seat belt use, according to an annual survey conducted by a contracted research firm. Yet the unbelted six percent accounted for 43 percent – almost half – of fatalities in traffic crashes in Oregon during 2006. This year, Oregon's belt use is up to 95.3%. Rankings of other states are not yet available.

All occupants age 16 and older are responsible to buckle themselves up, and adult passengers are responsible for properly restraining children under 16 in seat belts or child safety seats. Only taxi drivers are exempt from the law.

“Now that school's back in session, it's important not to take a risk when you're taking your children to school, for example,” said Levinski. “Adult safety belt systems do not adequately protect child passengers in crashes until children reach a size where the belt fits them correctly.”

Law enforcement agencies also will be on the lookout for people driving too fast for road and traffic conditions – the leading factor in Oregon fatal crashes – and DUII, an element in more than one-third of deadly crashes. Police also watch for drivers following too closely – tailgating is the single most common factor in all types of vehicle collisions in Oregon, not just fatal crashes.

Drivers also need to remember that Oregon law requires motorists to move over to another available lane when approaching the rear of an emergency vehicle on the side of the road with its emergency lights activated. If another lane is not available, drivers must slow down. Violation of this law can cost \$355. ODOT offers these quick refreshers to improve safety:

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**Oregon adult seat belt law**

- Oregon law requires that all motor vehicle operators and passengers be properly secured with a safety belt or safety harness.
- This means that both parts of a lap and shoulder belt system must be worn together, only one person per belt, and no placement of the shoulder belt behind the back or under the arm. Any of these situations places the vehicle occupant at severe risk of internal crash injury.

**Oregon child restraint law**

- Infants must ride rear facing to one year AND 20 pounds.
- Children under weighing less than 40 pounds must be restrained in child seats.
- Children weighing more than 40 pounds must use booster seats until they attain 8 years of age OR 4-feet 9-inches in height.

**Recommendations for children**

- While it is not the law in Oregon, it is strongly recommended that children aged twelve and under ride in rear seating positions. Research indicates that such rear seating reduces the risk of injury by 37% for that age group.

**Minors in pickup beds**

- Minors – anyone under the age of 18 – are prohibited from riding in the open bed of a pickup unless all front passenger seating is occupied by other minors and they are traveling in the scope of employment or between hunting camps, AND they are seated on the floor of the pickup bed with the tailgate fastened.

**Safety belt comfort tips**

- Use the built-in adjuster. These adjusters are located in outboard seating positions and slide up or down to change the angle at which the shoulder belt comes over your shoulder. Look for them near the highest point of your shoulder belt mounting.
- Adjust your seating position, either by moving yourself in the seat or by using vehicle seat height adjustments. Again, you are trying to change the angle at which the belt comes over and across your shoulder.
- Use a padded belt cover to cushion between the shoulder belt and your neck.
- Ask your auto dealer or vehicle manufacturer what they would recommend.
- When you shop for a new vehicle, make sure to test drive it with your safety belt on and check for comfort before you buy.
- For help with repair, installation or retrofitting of safety belts, call your vehicle dealer or vehicle manufacturer's customer service department.

More information on safety restraints: [www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/safetybelts.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/safetybelts.shtml). For help with child safety systems: [www.childsafetyseat.org](http://www.childsafetyseat.org)

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