

Debunking Seat Belt Myths

By this time everyone must be familiar with some of the statistics about motor vehicle accidents, injuries, and fatalities. For example:

- Over 12 million vehicular accidents per year, involving over 20 million vehicles, and of course even greater numbers of people.
- More than 50,000 fatalities and millions of disabling injuries yearly.
- The major cause of work-related deaths—more than one-third.

The value of "buckling up for safety," because use of seat belts could prevent well over half of each year's vehicular fatalities, has also been emphasized over and over again.

And yet there is a reluctance, or even refusal, by many to take advantage of this protection. And a number of excuses have been offered to justify this refusal. Here are a few myths that, for safety's sake, need to be exploded:

- "I just don't think I'll be one of those statistics; I'm a careful driver." Many of those killed in motor vehicle accidents were in no way at fault, and many were passengers—and more than half of them were not wearing their seat belts.
- It has been estimated that every one of us can expect to be in a crash every 10 years—a fifth of those will be serious crashes. Out of every 60 children born today, one will be involved in a fatal vehicle accident.
- "I'd rather be thrown from the car—that would be safer in the long run." Wrong. Passengers thrown out of a vehicle are 25 more times likely to travel to the morgue.
- "I'm afraid I'll be trapped in the car, in a fire or under water, and won't be able to get my seat belt off to escape." Only about one vehicle accident in 250 involves fire or deep water. Even in those that do, failure to wear a seat belt increases the likelihood of serious injury that would, itself, prevent escape.
- "I can brace myself if there's a crash." Very unlikely, when you realize that the force of impact at 30 miles an hour is the same as if your vehicle fell off a five-story building. (Remember, too, that a 30-mph impact means one car hitting a stationary object at that speed. A collision between two vehicles traveling at 30 mph has a 60-mph impact.)
- "I'll use mine on a long highway trip, but not when I'm just buzzing into town for groceries." Not a sound move, since two out of three car accidents take place within 25 miles of home—and half of fatal accidents occur at speeds under 40 mph.
- "I really resent seat belt laws, because they don't treat me as an adult with the right to make decisions about my own safety." The point here is that a driver who is not wearing a seat belt can reduce the margin of safety of others in the same car or the same traffic.

I hope none of you have been in the habit of using one of these excuses—or any other excuse—for not buckling up on the road, as either a driver or a passenger. If you have been, I hope you now realize that ignoring your seat belt is taking a serious gamble. It's a gamble in which there are no winnings and the losses may be permanent.