

How To Protect Vehicle Occupants

It's not that Melissa dismissed the notion of fastening her seat belt. The thought just never entered her mind. She and her friends were eager to begin their picnic in the country, and there was more hurry than caution to her actions. At some point Melissa lost control of her car, and it rolled over several times.

The vibrant young high school cheerleader was thrown from the automobile and left paralyzed from the waist down. She knows she would have avoided her tragedy with a simple, three-second procedure. And that's hardly a cheerful thought.

Based on National Safety Council statistics, lifetime odds are 1-in-2 that you will suffer a temporary or permanent disabling injury in a traffic crash, and about 1-in-100 that you will be killed. Surprisingly, the majority of crashes causing injury or death occur within 25 miles of home at speeds under 40 mph.

Superior engineering is making automobiles safer, but the ultimate responsibility for safety rests with the people behind the wheel.

Safety Belts Are Mandatory

* According to the National Safety Council, passenger car and light truck occupants who wear safety belts cut the risk of serious or fatal injury in collisions between 45 and 65 percent.

* Ejection from a vehicle is one of the most injurious events that can happen to a person in a crash. In fact, you are 25 times more likely to die when you are thrown from your vehicle. The safest place in a crash is inside your car. Buckle up!

* If buckled in, you won't be:

- flung through the windshield,
- pitched into traffic, or against a telephone post or tree,
- thrown across rough, lacerating surfaces, or
- crushed by your own vehicle.

* For everyone's protection, back-seat passengers should be buckled in. That way they won't become dangerous projectiles in the automobile cabin in the event of a crash.

Oh, and for the skeptics in the crowd, please note: drowning or incineration accounts for less than one-tenth of 1 percent of deaths in automobile crashes. And it's easier to escape if you're conscious.

In Vehicles With Air Bags

Air bags are a supplement to safety belts and are not intended to be a substitute for them. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the overall fatality-reducing effectiveness for air bags is about 14 percent over and above the benefits from using safety belts. In vehicles with air bags:

* All passengers should wear safety belts.

* Place rear-facing child safety seats in the back seat of vehicles with passenger-side air bags. A deploying air bag can cause serious and fatal head injuries to a child.

* Keep your hands away from the steering wheel hub that contains the air bag. An inflating air bag could break a hand or fingers.

* If you have a passenger side air bag, kids under age 13, or 5-feet-3 inches, should ride in the back seat.

* Sit as far back from the steering wheel as is comfortably possible. You should sit at least 10 inches away from the wheel.

* If you are short, try tilting the steering wheel down and raising the seat to achieve 10 inches and still drive comfortably. If this doesn't work, pedal extenders should be considered. The further away you are, the more efficiently the bag will work.

Pregnant Women, Children And Pets

* Pregnant women should position the lap belt as low as they can under the abdominal bulge and let the shoulder strap rest across their chest. Wearing both belts will protect both the mother and the fetus. In cold weather, unbutton outer clothing so the belt won't creep up.

* Do not hold a child on your lap in a moving automobile. In a crash, it could be crushed between the occupant and dashboard or windshield, or hit by a deploying air bag. The only safe place for a child is in an approved safety seat.

* To be sure the safety seat is correctly installed, go to a local organization that offers to check safety seat installation.

* Whenever possible, children should ride in the center of the back seat, properly restrained.

* If a child must ride in the front seat, make sure the seat is all the way back, the child stays belted, and sits back in the seat.

* When you drive with your pet, use a pet safety belt.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

John Myre is the author of the award-winning book, *Live Safely in a Dangerous World*, <http://www.thesafetybook.com>, and the publisher of the *Safety Times* Reproducible Articles, <http://www.safetytimes.com>.