



Safety Belt Law May Help Teens, Says AAA Michigan

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New safety belt law may
help teens, says AAA

Standard enforcement of Michigan's mandatory safety belt law may have come just in time to help the state's young drivers, who lag far behind most other drivers in safety belt use, AAA Michigan said.

"Safety belt use by young adults fell dramatically in 1999," said Jerry Basch, AAA Michigan Community Safety Services manager. "Recent surveys show that belt use rates for the 16 through 29-year-old age group dropped from 63.6 percent in 1998 to 57.4 percent in 1999. This is unacceptable."

Overall belt use rates in Michigan now hover around 70 percent, said Basch. The good news is that all age groups may buckle up with greater frequency beginning March 10, when standard enforcement goes into effect.

The law will allow police to stop motorists who are not wearing their safety belts. In the past, Michigan law only allowed police to ticket someone for not wearing safety belts only if the person was stopped on another traffic violation.

"The new standard enforcement law should increase belt usage from the current estimated 70 percent, to 81 percent, save 100 lives a year and prevent 3,000 serious injuries," Basch said.

The new law will be the subject of a statewide campaign launched by the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) March 8. Called "Click It or Ticket, a New Law You Can Live With," the campaign will heighten awareness of the new law. Among the key provisions:

* If front seat passengers are not wearing a safety belt, police can now stop the vehicle;

* An operator of a motor vehicle who violates the law will receive a ticket and be fined \$25.

* All children under the age of 4 must be in a child safety seat, in all seating positions.

According to Basch, teens and young adults account for more than one-third of all motor vehicle injuries in Michigan, and the number of people who die in traffic crashes typically rises in the spring.

"Standard enforcement is a law all motorists can live with," said Basch. "And as prom season and graduation days approach, it makes more sense than ever for young people to click it or ticket."

Free brochures outlining the new laws are available at all AAA Michigan offices statewide.

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