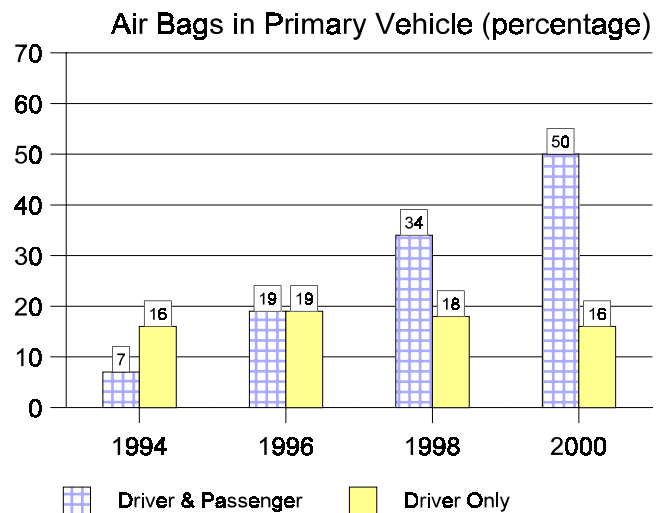


DRIVERS WHO HAVE AIR BAGS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WEAR THEIR SEAT BELTS TOO

Every two years, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducts a national telephone survey to monitor the public's attitudes about seat belts, child safety seats, air bags, and other occupant protection topics. The 2000 survey consisted of two questionnaires, each given to a randomly selected sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 and older for a total of about 12,000. Interviewing ran from November 8, 2000 through January 21, 2001.

Two out of Three Drivers have Air Bags

- The percentage of drivers with air bags in their primary vehicles has continued to increase. In 2000, 67 percent reported air bags in their primary vehicles, compared to 53 percent in late 1998. Only 5 percent of drivers reported having side air bags in the vehicle they drive most often.
- Most of the public (82%) would prefer air bags in their next vehicle, compared to 5% who are not sure and 13% who would prefer not to have them.
- Air bags and seat belts are two parts of a vehicle's passenger safety system. Safety experts emphasize that drivers and passengers should always wear their seat belts, regardless of whether or not the vehicle contains an air bag. The overwhelming majority (94%) know that air bags are not a substitute for seat belts.
- Drivers who wore their seat belts *sometimes* or *rarely/never* were more likely to say (incorrectly) that seat belts do not need to be worn when an air bag is present.
- Reported *all-the-time* seat belt use is higher in vehicles equipped with air bags (85%) compared to vehicles that do not have an air bag (80%).



Minimum Speed for Air Bag Deployment

There was no consensus among the public about the minimum speed at which air bags deploy (the change in crash velocity necessary for an air bag to deploy can vary based on the make, model, and year of a vehicle). Their estimates of impact speed for deployment spread fairly evenly from less than 6 mph to over 40 mph. Three in ten said they did not know the minimum speed for deployment.

Location of Impact and Air Bag Deployment

Most of the public were aware that air bags deploy in front-end impacts. The overwhelming majority (86%) believed air bags would deploy if the vehicle were hit from the front at a moderate speed. However, half of the public age 16 and older *incorrectly* thought air bags would deploy if hit from the rear.

Safety Concerns

Even though 82% of the public would prefer an air bag in their next vehicle, many (46%) still expressed



concerns about injuries possible from air bags. The concerns were equally divided among concern about injuries from air bags to children (30%), to adults (29%), and other technical issues (35%) such as speed of deployment and release of chemicals.

Likelihood of Injury

Drivers were divided on whether they thought they would be injured in a crash involving major vehicle damage if they were in an air bag equipped vehicle. Nearly half (45%) felt injury was unlikely with air bags. More than one third (36%) felt injuries were likely in such a crash even with air bags. A fairly large proportion said they weren't sure (14%) or it depends on other factors (5%).

Youth and young adults were more likely than older drivers to believe they would be injured if they were in a crash in an air bag equipped vehicle. Nearly half of drivers ages 16-20 (48%) believed it is likely they would be injured, with the percentage decreasing steadily across successive driver age groups until reaching 28% for drivers 65 or older.

All respondents were asked what they thought was the likelihood that, when an air bag deploys normally: 1) an adult sitting in the front seat would be injured by the air bag; and 2) a small child sitting in the front seat would be injured by the air bag. Over half (52%) believed it either *somewhat likely* (38%) or *very likely* (14%) that an adult would be injured by an air bag. The majority (59%) thought that it was very likely that a small child would be injured by an air bag. Eight in ten (81%) people believed it was either *somewhat likely* or *very likely* a small child sitting in the front seat would be injured by an air bag opening normally.

Feeling Safer with Air Bags

Despite some concerns about air bag safety, nearly half (48%) said they felt safer in vehicles with air bags compared to 7% who said they felt less safe. Forty percent said they felt about as safe with air bags as without them.

Car Seats

The 2000 survey asked a detailed set of child car seat questions to a subgroup of parents of children under age 9, or non-parents living with children under age 9 who at least sometimes drove with those children.

- The overwhelming majority (97%) of this subgroup knew that the back seat is the safest part of the vehicle to place a child's car seat. Nonetheless, 6% still usually placed the child in the front seat when they drove.
- Drivers were more likely to place car seats in the front seat if their primary vehicle did not have an air bag. About 4% of those having air bags said they usually place the car seat in the front seat. By contrast, 9% of those without any air bags said they put the car seat in the front.
- Most (92%) said it was unsafe to place a rear-facing car seat in the front seat of a vehicle having passenger-side air bags. However 4% erroneously believed it was safe to do so, and another 4% said they were not sure if it was safe or not.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *2000 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey Volume 3 Air Bag Report*, (49 pages) prepared by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. write to the Office of Research and Traffic Records, NHTSA, NTS-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096 or download the report from www.nhtsa.dot.gov

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