

Traffic Safety Facts

Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series

Number 370

March 2009

2007 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (MVOSS) Finds Continued Strong Support for Air Bags

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducts the Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (MVOSS) on a periodic basis to monitor the public's attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior regarding occupant protection devices (seat belts, child restraints, air bags). The 2007 survey consisted of two questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a randomly selected national sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 and older. Interviewing ran from January 9, 2007 to April 30, 2007.

9 out of 10 Primary Vehicles Have Air Bags

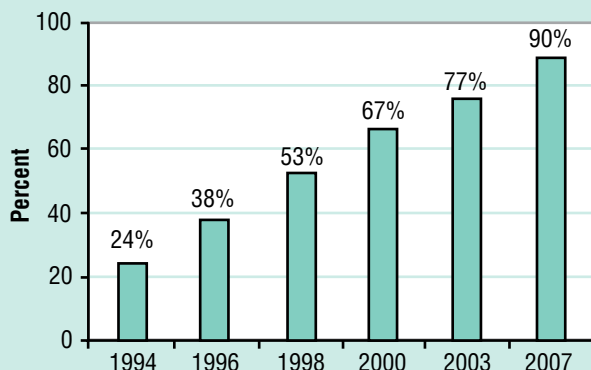
The percentage of drivers with air bags in their primary vehicles continues to increase. In 2007, 90% reported air bags in their primary vehicle, compared to 77% in 2003. Most (61%) reported having driver and passenger frontal air bags only. Another 18% said they had frontal driver and passenger air bags as well as other air bags in their vehicle (e.g., in front-seat car doors, in rear-seat car doors, descending curtains). Six percent reported having a driver air bag only, while 3% said they had frontal driver and passenger air bags but were

not sure about the presence of any other type of air bag. Other response combinations accounted for the remaining 2% of drivers.

Preference for Air Bags

Most of the public age 16 and older (92%) would prefer to have air bags in their next vehicle, with 90% wanting both driver and passenger air bags and 2% wanting driver air bags only. Five percent did not want air bags, and 3% were unsure. The percentage preferring air bags has steadily risen since 1996, when the question was first asked. In 1996, 72% said they would prefer that their next vehicle have air bags.

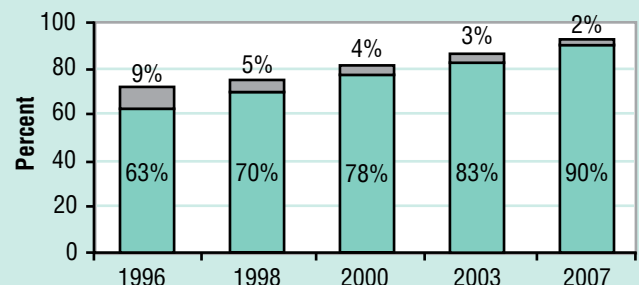
Air Bags in Primary Vehicle, 1994-2007



Qx: Does the (car/truck/van) you normally drive have an air bag?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle is not a motorcycle.

Prefer Air Bags in Next Vehicle, 1996-2007



Qx: Would you prefer that your next vehicle have driver air bags only, driver and passenger air bags, or no air bags?

Base: Total population age 16 and older.

More than three-fifths of respondents (62%) said they felt safer in motor vehicles with air bags than in motor vehicles without air bags. This is a 9 percentage point increase from the 2003 number, and 20 percentage points above the 1996 number. Most others (31%) said they felt about the same in air-bag-equipped vehicles as in vehicles not having air bags. Three percent felt less safe in motor vehicles with air bags and 4% were unsure. More than 9-in-10 persons believed an air bag would provide either a lot (40%) or some (52%) protection in a crash involving major motor vehicle damage.

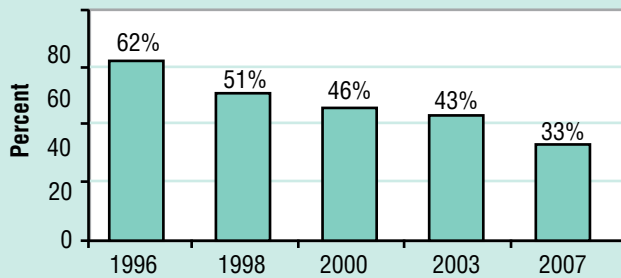
Air Bags Do Not Substitute for Seat Belt Use

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 seat belts, regardless of whether or not the vehicle contains an air bag. The overwhelming majority of the public (96%) knew that the presence of air bags does not substitute for seat belt use. Drivers were more likely to report that they wore a seat belt "all the time" while driving if the primary vehicle driven had air bags (88%) than if it did not (81%).

Safety Concerns About Air Bags

Even though 92% of the public would prefer air bags in their next vehicle, many (33%) still expressed concerns about the safety of air bags. However, the percentage expressing safety concerns was barely more than one-half the percentage who expressed safety concerns in 1996. Females (37%) were more likely to have safety concerns than were males (28%). When asked what concerns they had, the respondents tended to refer specifically to injuries they believed air bags could cause, or else described some functional characteristic of air bags that they considered a safety issue.

Have Safety Concerns About Air Bags, 1996-2007



Qx: Do you have any concerns about the safety of air bags?

Base: Total population age 16 and older.

Likelihood of Injury

The majority of the public believed that an adult sitting in the front seat would be somewhat likely or very likely injured by an air bag that deployed in a normal manner. However, they were more likely to believe an injury would occur if the adult was unbelted (82%) rather than wearing a seat belt (52%). Children were considered particularly vulnerable to injury from air bags, with almost 90% believing a small child sitting in the front seat would be very likely (68%) or somewhat likely (19%) injured by an air bag opening normally.



U.S. Department of Transportation
**National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., NTI-130
Washington, DC 20590

Warning Labels in Vehicle

More than one-half (58%) of drivers who had air bags in their primary vehicle reported that warning labels about air bags were posted in the vehicle. Eleven percent said there were no warning labels in the vehicle and 5% were uncertain. The remaining 26% had said in response to a preceding question that they had not heard or seen any safety warnings about air bags, so they were not asked if there were warning labels present. Warning labels were predominantly identified as being on the sun visor (79%). Other reported locations were the dashboard (12%), glove compartment (8%), and owner's manual (7%). Drivers with an air-bag-equipped vehicle were more likely to report the presence of a warning label if the vehicle was purchased new (64%) as opposed to used (53%).

Car Seats

The 2007 survey asked child car seat questions to a subsample of parents of children under age 9, and non-parents living with children under 9 who at least sometimes drove with those children. The questions were asked of those for whom a specific child was identified who was using a child restraint. MVOSS defined child car seat as any child restraint appropriate for an infant, toddler, or older child too small for a seat belt alone to fit the child properly. Almost all (99%) knew the back seat is the safest place in the vehicle to place a child's car seat. Yet 3% still usually placed the car seat in the front. The percentage was 1% if the respondent's primary vehicle had a passenger frontal air bag.

How to Order

For a copy of *2007 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey, Volume 3 Air Bags Report* (42 pages plus Appendix) prepared by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to 202-366-7394, or download from www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Alan Block was the project manager for this study.

TRAFFIC TECH is a publication to disseminate information about traffic safety programs, including evaluations, innovative programs, and new publications. Feel free to copy it as you wish. If you would like to receive a copy, contact Dr. Angela Eichelberger, Editor, fax 202-366-7394, e-mail: traffic.tech@dot.gov.