

# Priority Level Two: Unrestrained Vehicle Occupants

## Review Draft

One of the leading factors in the steady decline in traffic fatalities and serious injuries in Washington has been increased seat belt usage. Fatalities related to non-usage of seat belts have dropped at a rate of 14 deaths per year since 2002, when the Click-it-or-Ticket (CIOT) campaign began. The graph below shows the dramatic improvement in seatbelt related fatalities in recent years.

Washington State seat belt enforcement efforts began in 1986 with the passage of a secondary seat belt law. Under the secondary law, a law enforcement officer could not stop a vehicle with an unbuckled occupant unless he or she also spotted a primary violation. The primary enforcement law went into effect in June 2002, resulting in policies, and programs that had a dramatic effect on seat belt use rates. During this time, the Washington State Patrol made seat belt enforcement one of its core missions and the WTSC launched the Click-it-or-ticket program.

To increase seat belt usage, the Click-it-or-Ticket campaigns use grants to fund law enforcement patrols that focus primarily on seat belt violators. These campaigns also use extensive publicity about the increased law enforcement patrols for seat belt usage, including television ads, radio spots, and public

relations activities. In addition, the semi-annual Click-it-or-Ticket special emphasis events are advertised via WSDOT's 125 variable message signs on freeways and highways across the state. Also, 625 permanent seat belt road signs advertise the program at all hours on all road types.

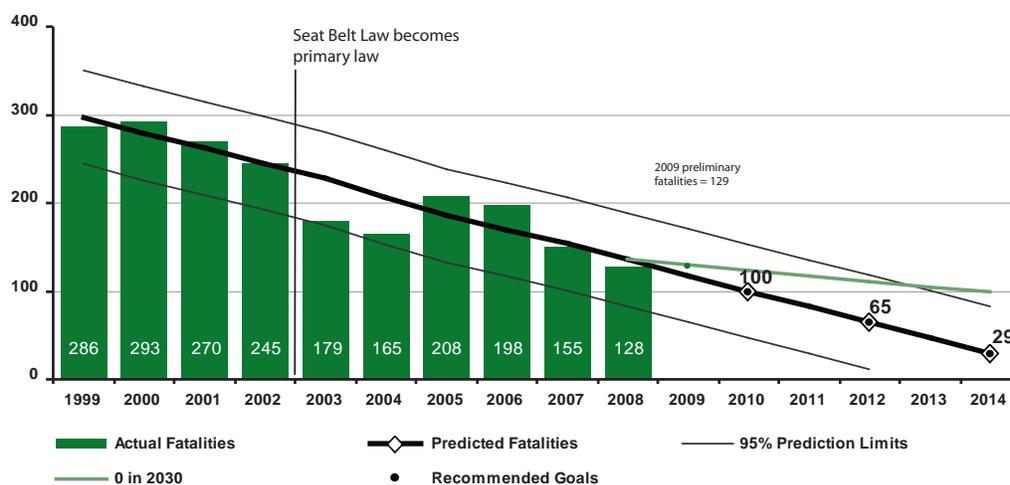
### Nighttime enforcement efforts

In 2006, in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the WTSC focused its seatbelt efforts on unbuckled motorists who travel at night. The reason: the nighttime vehicle occupant death rate is at least four times higher than the daytime rate. Preliminary research indicates that nighttime unbuckled motorists have more traffic violations and are more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious injury collision than their buckled counterparts. They are also more likely to have criminal records than other motorists.

The Nighttime Seat Belt Project Enforcement (NTSBE) partnership included \$1.3 million in additional grant funding from NHTSA, plus funding from WTSC. Beginning with the May 2007 statewide mobilization, all grant-funded seat belt patrols and media messages focused on nighttime drivers. The table on the next page illustrates why nighttime unbuckled

motorists are a concern, as well as the beneficial impacts of the nighttime focus.

### Unrestrained Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities: Trends, Forecasts, and Goals



Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System

### New strategies focus on tribes, child restraints, and teens

Car crashes are the leading cause of death for Washington's teens. In 2002, a NHTSA-sponsored study of seat belt use determined that the lowest seat belt use of any age category nationally was teens ages 16 – 20.

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## Washington State Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities<sup>1</sup> and Seatbelt Use, 1998-2008

| Period   | Years     | Average annual vehicle occupant fatalities <sup>1</sup> |          | Average annual vehicle occupant nighttime fatalities <sup>1</sup> |          | Statewide Seatbelt usage rate | Seatbelt Usage rate in nighttime <sup>2</sup> fatal collisions |
|--|-----------|---|----------|---|----------|-------------------------------|--|
|  |           | number  | % change | number  | % change |                               |  |
| Before Primary Seat Belt Law and Click it or Ticket (CIOT)   | 1998-2002 | 507   | n/a      | 218   | n/a      | 83%                           | 31%  |
| After Primary Seat Belt Law and Click it or Ticket (CIOT), before Nighttime Seatbelt Enforcement (NTSBE) | 2003-2006 | 445   | -12%     | 199   | -9%      | 95%                           | 46%  |
| After CIOT & NTSBE   | 2007-2008 | 376   | -16%     | 171   | -14%     | 96%                           | 47%  |

Source: FARS, Statewide Observational Seat Belt Survey

<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include pedestrian, bicycle, and motorcycle fatalities, nor passengers in motorhomes, buses, or commercial motor vehicles.

<sup>2</sup> Nighttime collisions from 7pm to 4:49 am

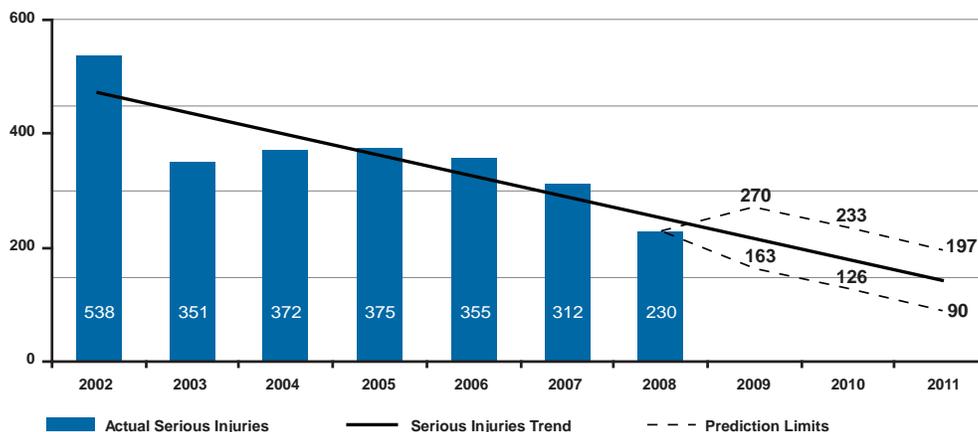
In 2007, WTSC spearheaded a seat belt promotional program aimed at increasing seat belt use among teens. Piloted in the Tri Cities at Southridge High School in Kennewick, the project promoted seat belt use with a mix of positive reinforcement and peer-to-peer education. A later evaluation found that it raised seat belt use among the school population from 81%

to 96% during the project; an observational survey conducted three months after the end of the project found that seat belt use had remained high, at 95%.

Because the research shows low seat belt use patterns on Tribal reservations, and over-representation of seat-belt non-usage

for Native Americans in fatality collisions, this seat belt promotional project is being expanded to tribal reservations in 2009 and 2010.

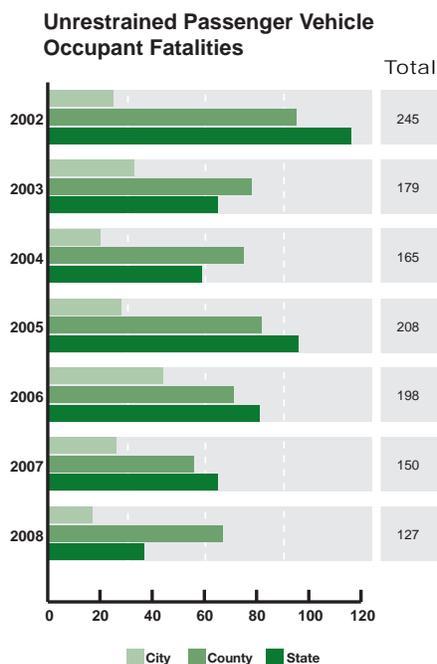
## Unrestrained Passenger Vehicle Occupant Serious Injuries: Trends and Forecasts



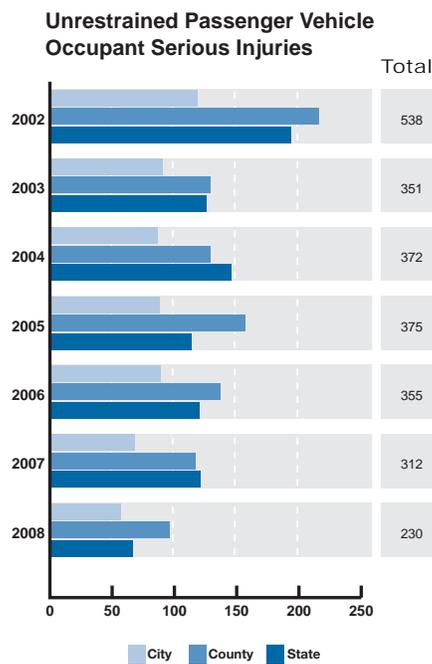
Source: WSDOT Collision Database

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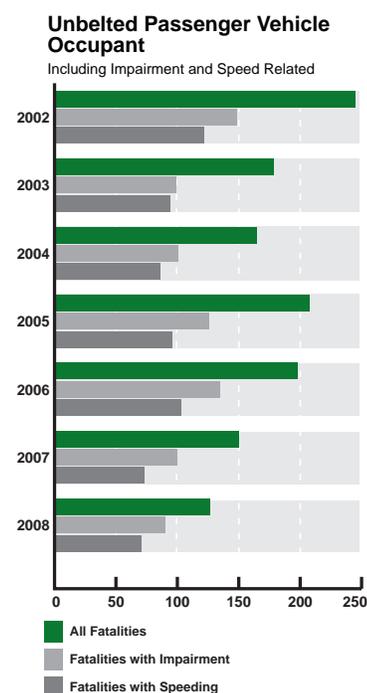
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Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System



Source: WSDOT Collision Database



Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission

## Child Car Seat Initiatives

Seat belt usage is just one part of appropriate restraint; babies and young children must use car seats proportionate with their size in order to be protected in the event of a collision. Washington state collision data shows children who incur either minor injuries or none at all in collisions were appropriately restrained at least 86% of the time. When

### Percent of children restrained in carseats or wearing seatbelts in collisions, by age and injury severity, 2002-2005

| Age     | Severity of Injury |                 |                |              |                |       |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-------|
|         | No Injury          | Possible Injury | Evident Injury | Minor Injury | Serious Injury | Fatal |
| 0       | 97.4%              | 93.8%           | 90.9%          | 92.6%        | 81.8%          | 81.8% |
| 1 to 3  | 99.3%              | 91.9%           | 90.4%          | 90.9%        | 82.7%          | 76.5% |
| 4 to 7  | 98.0%              | 90.1%           | 85.8%          | 87.7%        | 80.7%          | 82.4% |
| 8 to 12 | 98.3%              | 97.0%           | 96.5%          | 96.7%        | 82.8%          | 81.7% |

Source: WSDOT Collision Database

## Washington's Child Car Seat Law

- Infants must ride in rear-facing infant seats
- Children ages 1 to 4 must ride in child car seats with a five point harness
- Children up to age 8 or 4'9" tall must ride in booster seats
- Children up to age 13 must ride in the back seat when it is practical to do so

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a child is seriously injured or killed in a collision, he or she is only likely to be using appropriate restraints 77-83% of the time.

In 2008-09, Washington developed Click-it-or-Ticket-style patrols aimed at improving parental compliance with Washington's child car seat law. In Spokane, Moses Lake, Aberdeen/Hoquiam and Wenatchee, organizers used local radio and television PSAs, bright orange pop up signs and variable message signs on busy roads, and posters and banners to raise awareness about the child car seat law and the patrols conducted as part of the project.

### Child Passenger Safety Public Education and Technician Training

WTSC's comprehensive child passenger safety project, organized by the non-profit Safety Restraint Coalition, conducts on-going efforts to reduce injuries and deaths by educating parents about the importance of correctly installing and using child safety seats, booster seats and seat belts.

The Coalition trains safety technicians who check for correct placement of child car seats at such venues as child car seat check stations and safety fairs.

The Coalition also distributes educational materials to parents via the 1-800-BUCK-L-UP hotline. The hotline has a Spanish-language component since research shows lower -than-average car seat use among the children of Spanish-speaking parents. In 2009, the hotline received nearly 5000 calls. Parents and caregivers can access detailed child passenger safety information through the WSSRC website: [www.800buckleup.org](http://www.800buckleup.org).

### Who doesn't wear a seat belt?

The WTSC commissions a statewide observational survey of about 100,000 front seat drivers and passengers to determine the statewide seat belt use rate. The numbers reflect lower seat belt use in the less densely populated, rural areas of Washington. WTSC's analysis of demographic information about unbuckled motorists who die in vehicle crashes shows that this population skews male, age 16-34. Research conducted by NHTSA corroborates these findings, and further identifies those who tend to be unbuckled as more likely to be blue-collar professionals and pickup trucks drivers, with over-representation among Hispanic and Native American populations.

### Reducing Unbelted Collisions

Effective strategies for this issue focus on getting more people to use restraints properly. Enforcement and education are the two main components of these strategies. They include more statewide seat belt mobilizations focused on nighttime drivers, ongoing and regular enforcement focused on low seat belt use areas, teen-focused seat belt promotional projects in high schools across Washington, and additional projects aimed at improving the correct use of child car seats.

### 2.3 Objectives and Strategies to Increase Correct Seat Belt and Child Restraint Use

#### 2.3.A. Maximize use of occupant restraints by all vehicle occupants.

2.3.A1. Continue statewide high-visibility enforcement and media campaigns to maximize restraint use. (P)

- Develop programs encouraging individual law enforcement officers and law enforcement agencies to enforce the seat belt law during non-campaign times.
- Continue program to address nighttime seat belt enforcement.

2.3.A2. Provide enhanced public education to population groups with lower than average restraint use rates. (P)

- Target efforts towards sub-populations (as shown through research) of non-seat belt users, such as Spanish speakers, Native Americans, and people who live in rural areas.
- Utilize community traffic safety task forces to address occupant protection issues.
- Provide support for Tribal Nations seeking to improve seat belt and child restraint use.

2.3.A3. Encourage the enactment of State and tribal laws that will enhance enforcement of seat belt laws. (T)

- Encourage tribes to enact seatbelt laws.

2.3.A4 Promote seat belt and child restraint use among Tribal Nations.

2.3.A5 Take appropriate steps to promote parental and care giver adherence to Washington's child car seat law and to ensure that children are properly restrained

- Conduct and research pilot projects aimed at gaining compliance with the WA child restraint law but which use the Click it or Ticket program model.
- Promote child car seat law education among grandparents.
- Conduct high profile "child restraint inspection" events at multiple community locations, and expand areas in the community where people can get their child car seats checked and expand the types of professionals who check child car seats. (P), (E)
- Increase child car seat resources for low-income families, such as subsidized car seats and education.
- Continue the statewide child passenger safety website, toll free information line, and education programs.

2.3.A6 Continue researching the impact of the teen-focused Click it And Ticket Project. If research shows that the program is successful, expand the project to other areas (colleges, tribal programs, etc.)