

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

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Clover Connection

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Did you know that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation) provides valuable traffic safety information through the Passenger Safety Project? The project's primary focus is on increasing child restraint and safety belt usage, but encourages all Texans to buckle up before hitting the road.

It only takes 3 seconds and could potentially save your life. Taking those few seconds to buckle your seat belt is the most important step you can take to protect yourself in a crash. Fortunately, most Texans now buckle up, but some groups of motorists continue not taking the message to heart and not consistently using their seat belts. The demographic of motorist most likely to be unrestrained are men and young adults, especially pickup truck drivers and passengers. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 50 percent of people killed in crashes nationally are unrestrained, which goes up to 61 percent for pickup truck occupants. The Texas Department of Transportation reports that last year, 40 percent of those killed in Texas crashes were found to be unrestrained. According to NHTSA, in 2015 alone, seat belts prevented 370 fatalities and 6,652 serious injuries in Texas. When the "Click It or Ticket" campaign began in 2002, just 76 percent of Texans used seat belts. Today, more than 90 percent of Texans buckle up.

After many years of having seat belts as a standard part in vehicles, it would seem that buckling your seat belt before driving off would be second nature. However, pickup truck drivers and their passengers depend on their larger size vehicle to protect them in a crash. Yet, pickup trucks are twice as likely to rollover as passenger cars. Due to pickup trucks' tendency to

rollover in crashes, the consequences are more severe for drivers and occupants not wearing seat belts — including being thrown from the vehicle, or even death.

Unbuckled passengers can also be deadly to others in the vehicle. Most people are not aware of the dangers posed by unbuckled backseat passengers. In a crash, they can become projectiles that are tossed around inside the vehicle, often injuring or killing those in the front seat. Passengers in the back seat who use lap and shoulder belts are 44 percent more likely to survive in a crash than unrestrained occupants in passenger cars, and 73 percent more likely to survive in passenger vans and SUVs.

Here's another good reason to buckle up: It's the law! Unbelted drivers and adult passengers can face fines and court costs of up to \$200. Children younger than 8-years-old must be in a child safety seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4 feet 9 inches. Fines issued to drivers for unrestrained children in their vehicle can be as high as \$250, plus court costs.

The "Click It or Ticket" campaign this year is scheduled for May 23-June 5, which includes Memorial Day weekend. During this time, extra law enforcement will be on the road enforcing the seat belt and child restraint laws in an effort to save lives. Those officers are not out to write tickets, but instead want to help prevent the needless tragedy from motor vehicle accidents. Remember to buckle up and save your life — not just during "Click It or Ticket," but every day of the year!

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