

DID YOU KNOW???

GEARSHIFT INTERLOCK – BUCKLE UP OR NO GO!

In New York State, over 90 % of drivers buckle up before driving - in fact, recent data shows the figure closer to 93 %. There are no data that I am aware of for rear-seat passengers. However, statistics show that 50% of those that die in highway crashes are not wearing seatbelts. If seatbelts didn't save lives, statistics would show that less than 10 % of people killed were not wearing seatbelts, not 50 %. Does anyone need more incentive to buckle up? Unfortunately, yes, and that extra incentive just might be in the form of gearshift interlocks.

In spite of laws in 49 states requiring safety belt use, an article in the November "Status Report" from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) finds that preventing an unbelted driver from shifting out of park increases the likelihood of belt use by more than 20 % among people who don't always use belts relative to an enhanced belt reminder. Enhanced reminders consist of three 20-second cycles spaced a minute or so apart, with audible and visual reminders to fasten their seat belt.

A change under MAP-21, the 2012 highway reauthorization law, allows the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to permit automakers to equip vehicles with belt interlocks as an alternative means to comply with certain federal safety standards. The technology prevents the use of a feature, such as the transmission, engine or entertainment system, if a belt isn't secured by the driver and front seat passenger, if there is one. Most new vehicles sold in the U.S. have enhanced reminders for the driver and front passenger that exceed federal requirements, and studies show that driver belt use is higher and fatality rates are lower in vehicles with enhanced belt reminders than in vehicles with reminders that meet minimum requirements.

That said, some drivers in an IIHS study occasionally did things to circumvent the interlock. Six of the 16 part-time belt users who experienced the gearshift interlock sat on the belt, waited for the system to deactivate or unbuckled during the trip at least once. The researchers would have seen a bigger bump in belt use — 24 percent — if the drivers had been unable to circumvent the gearshift interlock.

If every vehicle in the United States had a gearshift interlock that increased front seat belt use by 16 percent, at least 718 lives could be saved each year, the Institute estimates. "An additional 358 lives could be saved if interlocks couldn't be bypassed by front-seat occupants determined to ride unbelted", said David Kidd, a senior research scientist with the IIHS and the study's lead author. "Interlocks should be intrusive enough to get the attention of unbelted drivers and front passengers, but at the same time they shouldn't aggravate the vast majority of people who always use belts", says Kidd.

So, get ready for gearshift interlock or at least some other strong persuasion to get you to buckle up. Hopefully, you don't need it.

For more articles on traffic law and safety, go to the traffic safety board's web site at: www.franklincony.org and click on "Traffic Safety Board" under departments then look for Did You Know articles. You may also email me at: dwerner151@verizon.net