



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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Governor Blagojevich announces safety belt use tops 90 percent for second straight year

Fatal crashes are down sharply in Illinois in 2008, as state continues to make gains in saving lives, since Governor Blagojevich signed safety belt enforcement law in 2003

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced that Illinois has continued to make gains in roadway safety in 2008, as the number of motorists and front seat passengers who buckle up in the state edged upwards and exceeded 90 percent for the second straight year. The Illinois Department of Transportation’s (IDOT) Division of Traffic Safety reports the overall number of fatalities on Illinois roads is down by 19 percent on a provisional basis for the first six months of 2008; from 598 in 2007, to 484 in 2008.

In addition, the number of teen fatalities is sharply lower in 2008, with 39 teen fatalities reported in the first six months of 2008 provisionally, compared to 82 in the first six months of 2007; a drop of 52 percent. This reduction coincides with the introduction of the Blagojevich administration’s launch of *Operation Teen Safe Driving*, a groundbreaking statewide effort to get teens involved in teaching safe driving skills to their peers, along with a set of stringent new teen driving laws, spearheaded by Secretary of State Jesse White.

“Illinois drivers have done a great job of buckling up and reducing fatal crashes in the first half of 2008,” said Governor Blagojevich. “We want to see this trend continue, both for the overall population as well as teen drivers. That’s why Illinois State Police will continue to aggressively enforce the primary safety belt law, and will stop and arrest impaired drivers.”

Since Governor Blagojevich signed the primary enforcement law in July of 2003, safety belt use in Illinois has gone up 14.3 percent, from 76.2 percent in 2003 to 90.5 percent in the statewide survey, just completed by IDOT’s Traffic Safety Division. Prior to enactment of the primary enforcement law, police could not pull a driver over based solely on a safety belt violation. After the law took effect in 2004 and police began aggressive safety belt enforcement, safety belt use

climbed to 83% in June of 2004, 86% in June of 2005, 88% percent in June of 2006, 90.1% in 2007, and 90.5% in June of 2008.

“Since the Governor signed the primary safety belt enforcement law, more and more drivers are buckling up and Illinois has seen a historic reduction in traffic fatalities,” said IDOT Secretary Milton R. Sees. “But, there are still too many drivers who are failing to buckle up. That’s why IDOT’s Division of Traffic Safety is going to continue to work with law enforcement and traffic safety advocates to push for zero tolerance toward drivers who fail to heed our warnings: ‘Click It or Ticket!’”

Only 13 states in the country attained that level of safety belt use, last year. In addition to more people wearing their safety belts, fatalities on Illinois roads have steadily declined since Governor Blagojevich signed the primary safety belt enforcement law. In 2003, there were 1,454 total fatalities; in 2004, there were 1,355; in 2005, there were 1,363; in 2006, there were 1,254; and, in 2007, there were 1,248. The past two years have seen the lowest number of traffic fatalities since 1924, when there were 1,065.

For the first six months of 2008, IDOT has recorded reductions in a number of subcategories, including motorcycle fatalities, which are down from 65 in the first six months of 2007, to 54 in a provisional basis for 2008. In addition, fatalities on the Interstate highway system are down, from 72 in the first six months of 2007, to 54 provisionally in the first six months of 2008.

“There is an obvious correlation between safety belt use and the fatality rate. Although the historically low fatality rates and record safety belt use is certainly encouraging, the Illinois State Police will continue with our efforts to further reduce fatalities and to increase safety belt use,” said Illinois State Police Director Larry G. Trent. “If motorists choose not to buckle up, they will receive a ticket.”

For more information about IDOT safety programs, go to www.buckleupillinois.org.