

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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BELT USE INCREASE: REMINDER SYSTEM IN FORDS PERSUADES MORE DRIVERS TO BUCKLE THEIR BELTS

ARLINGTON, VA — A unique safety belt reminder system installed in late model Ford passenger vehicles has increased driver belt use from 71 to 76 percent, a new study conducted in Oklahoma has found. Ford's reminder system differs from the one mandated by the federal government, which activates for no more than 8 seconds when cars are started. Ford's system flashes and chimes intermittently over several minutes if a driver doesn't buckle up.

In cooperation with Ford, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety researchers unob-

PERCENT DRIVER BELT USE IN VEHICLES WITH AND WITHOUT BELT REMINDERS		
	<u>No reminder</u>	<u>Reminder</u>
Male drivers	67%	72%
Female drivers	79%	84%
Total	71%	76%

trusively observed driver belt use when cars were brought in for service at 12 dealer-
ships in Tulsa and Oklahoma City during August and September. Overall use rates were 76 percent among drivers of vehicles with the new reminder systems compared with 71 percent among drivers of other vehicles.

"This may sound like a modest gain, but it's important when you consider the difficulty of changing the behavior of the minority of motorists who don't buckle up despite belt

use laws and all of the evidence about the effectiveness of safety belts. It has proven difficult to get these people to buckle up, and vehicle-based systems like Ford's clearly help," says the Institute's chief scientist, Allan Williams, author of the study.

The overall belt use rate in Oklahoma (where the study was conducted) is 68 percent, which is lower than the nationwide use rate of about 73 percent. It's also lower than

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the 71 percent belt use observed in this study among drivers of Fords without belt reminder systems. This is because drivers of new vehicles typically use their belts more than drivers of older vehicles, which means Ford's belt reminder system could produce bigger belt use increases as vehicles equipped with the systems get older and are driven by people with lower rates of belt use.

Ford's belt reminder system is in some 2000 models, most 2001s, and all 2002 models. If a driver doesn't buckle up, the system sounds a chime while flashing a warning light on the instrument panel. The system flashes and chimes for 6 seconds, pauses for 30 seconds, and then repeats for up to 5 minutes. The reminders stop as soon as a driver buckles up. It's possible, though not easy, to thwart the system by following a complicated series of steps outlined in the owner's manual. The reminder system also stops if a driver buckles and then unbuckles the safety belt.

End 2-page release on safety belt reminder system
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