

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE USE

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Campaign on belting up in the back seat being run

Southland adults lag behind the rest of New Zealand when it comes to belting up in the back seat.

The latest Ministry of Transport adult rear seat passenger survey showed only 64 percent of adult back-seat passengers in Southland wore seatbelts, compared to the national average of 89 percent.

Road Safety Southland Community Advisor Jane Ballantyne said Southland's low percentage of adult rear seat safety belt compliance is to some extent dragged down by the statistics from the Gore Region, which sits at just 53 percent compliance.

“But that is no excuse for the rest of Southland to become complacent.”

Road Safety Southland, along with ACC and Police, have been running a belt up campaign this month and have been mainly targeting the Gore and surrounding District areas. During this time lots of focused enforcement and a resident survey will be conducted.

Southland Strategic Traffic Unit Senior Sergeant Kerrin Price said seat belt offenders tend to be more high risk road users and are likely to have committed other offences such as speeding.

Seat belt effectiveness is directly related to speeding behaviour in that the higher the travel speed the greater the injury potential (and need for some form of protection) in a crash situation, Mr Price said.

Increasing the level of seat belt usage requires a coordinated approach involving education, engineering and enforcement measures.

Ms Ballantyne said it has been found habit was the main reason for people buckling up in the back seat.

People felt a false sense of security in the back seat and did not realize the danger they put themselves and front seat passengers in.

“The risk of death to front seat passengers who are wearing safety belts increases by 400 percent when someone in the back seat hasn't belted up,” Ms Ballantyne said.

The ministry website states: “Wearing a safety belt reduces your chance of death or serious injury in a crash by 40 percent whether you sit in the rear or front seat.”

ACC Injury Prevention Consultant Nic Miller said increasing the wearing of seat belts can benefit the Southland community through the reduction in the frequency and severity of injury claims resulting from a motor vehicle crash.

Over the past six months in Southland, three rear seat passengers, who were not wearing a safety belt at the time of the crash, were killed.

In New Zealand more than 30 lives would be saved each year if people wore their safety belts.

Mr Price said: “It's brilliant to have the support of other road safety conscious agencies (ACC, local Councils, Plunket, and Road Safe etc) as we work collaboratively around the province at checkpoints and the like, to increase compliance rates.

“Injury is a major public health issue and represents a significant cost to the country so there is plenty of room for improvement and significant savings can be made by some fairly simple actions, like wearing your seat belt.”

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