



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



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Why You Should Wear Your Seatbelt

We initiated this dispatch after noting a 2022 National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) study that identified only 91.6 percent of adult front-seat passengers wear a seatbelt. The study celebrated this as a record-high upward trend in seatbelt use over fifteen years but also found a 3 percent rise in unrestrained passenger fatalities. We found it profoundly alarming that 1 in 10 people are still not wearing a seatbelt in the 21st century, especially since unrestrained personnel make up 51 percent of passenger vehicle fatalities. Why anybody would risk becoming part of that statistic is beyond us, but if you are one of the ten percent not wearing a seatbelt, we hope the following scenarios will help you to reconsider your choice.



- Other Drivers Can Pose The Greatest Threat. A Sailor was a passenger—not wearing a seatbelt—while his wife drove. The couple was driving on the interstate at 70 mph when a drunk driver, traveling the same speed, came toward them against the traffic flow. When the vehicles came into view of each other, there wasn't time to react, and they collided at a 140 mph rate of closure. The Sailor was partially ejected and died at the scene of the crash. Notably, his spouse, who was wearing a seatbelt, received only “non-incapacitating injuries.” Had this Sailor worn his seatbelt, he very likely would have made it home safely with his wife. —*Even the best drivers in the world face the risk of other drivers' poor choices. Be prepared for uncontrollable scenarios.*
- Ending a Career Early. While attending entry-level military occupational specialty training, four Marines decided to go joyriding on the weekend. The school did not permit students to have vehicles, making their terrible collective decision the first in a series of actions they would all come to regret. The Marines continued their unchecked and ill-conceived plan by hopping in the car of a Marine who only had a driver's permit, not a full license. Three of the Marines capped this string of bad decisions off by not bothering to put their seatbelts on. This decision tree resulted in them being unrestrained as the unlicensed driver picked up speed, fishtailed, and lost control of the vehicle, rolling it multiple times. Two of the unrestrained Marines were ejected immediately but were lucky to have received only minor injuries. The third unbuckled Marine was thrown from the vehicle seconds after and was permanently paralyzed from his injuries. —*There is no excuse for the Marines to get in an unauthorized car with an unlicensed driver. Because of not taking two seconds to buckle up, a Marine's military career ended before it even started.*
- Overcorrection. While driving to work without a seatbelt on, a Sailor turned left onto a two-lane road divided by a center turn lane. As the Sailor completed the turn, he strayed too far to the right and struck the passenger side against the curb. He then overcorrected the vehicle, veering sharply to the left, causing him to cross into the center turn lane, which had another car in it. Each vehicle's front driver-side corner collided, causing the Sailor to eject from the car. He died before the emergency services even arrived on the scene. —*Accidents can happen in split seconds. Sometimes we can't react in time and sometimes, we react poorly. What we **can** do every time is put on a seat belt.*
- Prioritizing Comfort Over Safety. A group of five Sailors was tasked with transporting gear back to their home base after an exercise with a fifteen-pack van. After a night of about three to four hours of sleep, they loaded the equipment into the van and began their four-hour trip. Three of the Sailors layed down in the rear bench seats and a fourth took the front passenger seat. Each passenger left their seatbelt off so they

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could sleep better. After approximately two hours, the driver began to nod off. He awoke to the van driving over the rumbled strips on the shoulder. He tried to correct the loss of control but could not do so before hitting a boulder and rolling the van. The unstrained Sailors became projectiles colliding with each other and gear in the back. Each Sailor had significant injuries, including one permanent total disability and one fatality. —*It is natural to want to sleep when you get a chance, but that doesn't mean to should negate life-saving devices to do it more comfortably.*

- **Low Visibility.** Two Marines were in a highback HMMWV (Humvee) driving behind a light tactical vehicle in a training area. Due to dust and debris from the lead vehicle, visibility was restricted and the Humvee driver did not see an oncoming t-intersection turn. The driver swerved as he attempted to turn, but all too late, and the Humvee slid sideways, rolling onto its right side. The driver—not wearing their seatbelt—was thrown from and pinned under the vehicle resulting in spine, rib and lung injuries. —*Marines have all likely heard the argument that wearing a seatbelt in a Humvee is not tactical because it makes it harder to get out quickly. That argument loses traction, however, when you consider how hard it is to run down range with a crushed chest. Wear a seatbelt.*

- **Success Story.** Here is what happens when you wear your seatbelt. A Sailor was the passenger in a pickup truck with his friend driving after a light snow. After pulling onto the highway, they went over black ice and began to spin. The driver could not recover control of the vehicle and rolled three times. Because the driver and passenger wore seatbelts, their only injuries were scraped, bruised hands, minor abrasions and bruising from the seatbelt.

—*These people got in just as bad, if not worse, of a car accident than each of the previous examples, but they are alive and well for one reason. They wore their seatbelts.*

Key Takeaways

It is pretty apparent that the main point we want you to take from the variety of incidents we selected from the database—and there are many more examples—are you never know when you might be in a car accident. As the driver or the passenger, it can be on or off duty, in a tactical vehicle or a POV. Whether it's your fault or the other driver's, there is no way to guarantee you will not be in an accident or emerge uninjured. The only guarantee is that wearing a seatbelt will dramatically reduce the odds of you getting injured or worse if you are in a car accident. We usually provide a bulleted list of takeaways for consideration, but there is only one thing to take away from this. **Wear your seatbelt; it might save your life.**

The dangers of not buckling up



You are **30 times more likely** to be ejected from a vehicle during a crash



3 out of 4 people who are ejected during a crash die from their injuries

Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"