



November 16, 2009

## **The Governor's Highway Safety Office Reminds Rural Drivers *Click It or Ticket* Tennessee Buckling Down on Rural Motorists to Boost Seat Belt Use and Save Lives**

**Nashville, TN** – The Governor's Highway Safety Office is working to save lives by reminding rural drivers that wearing a safety belt is the single most effective way to prevent deaths and injuries during a traffic crash and it's also the law in Tennessee. GHSO is partnering with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and state and local law enforcement to conduct a special high-visibility *Click It or Ticket* enforcement campaign in November.

Americans driving or riding on rural roads face a much greater risk of being injured or killed in traffic crashes than motorists in urban areas. About a quarter of the U.S. population lives in rural areas yet rural fatalities account for more than half of all traffic deaths. In Tennessee, of the 776 people killed in car crashes in 2008, 62 percent were in rural areas.

"The numbers don't lie. More than fifty percent of people killed in traffic crashes last year were not wearing a safety belt," said Tennessee Department of Transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely. "That is why we are reminding motorists that seat belts help save lives. Buckle up every trip, every time."

Beginning November 16, and approaching the busy Thanksgiving travel holiday, Tennessee law enforcement agencies will be cracking down on drivers and passengers not buckled up during a special high-visibility *Click It or Ticket* enforcement campaign. Law enforcement officers will be particularly focused on rural areas of the state.

"In addition to rural motorists, teen drivers, particularly young males, and pickup truck drivers and passengers are most at risk of dying in a traffic crash," said GHSO Director Kendell Poole. "We must do all we can to protect ourselves and our passengers during the busy holiday travel season. Wear a safety belt every time you travel and make sure others in your vehicles buckle up as well, and talk to teens about the importance of buckling up every time they get into an automobile."

Statistics show low seat belt use in pickup trucks is a particularly big problem. In Tennessee, 72 percent of pickup truck occupants that were killed in a traffic crash were not wearing a seat belt.

52 law enforcement agencies in 19 counties are participating in this *Click It or Ticket* enforcement effort including agencies in: Anderson, Wayne, Franklin, Macon, Clay, Pickett, Overton, Jackson, Smith, DeKalb, White, Fentress, Morgan, Jefferson, Monroe, Bledsoe, Grundy, Marion and Sequatchie. The indication that there is both low seatbelt usage and a high unbelted fatality rate led to the choice of these communities.

"Seat belts clearly save lives. Unfortunately too many drivers, particularly those in our rural counties, still need a tough reminder," said Chief David Beams of the Oak Ridge Police Department. "We are committed to doing everything we can to convince drivers that regular seat belt use is the single most effective way to protect people and reduce fatalities in motor vehicle crashes."

Poole reminded motorists, "No more warnings and no more excuses. No matter who you are or where you are on the road, if you don't want to risk a ticket, or more importantly your life, *Click It or Ticket.*"

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