August 15, 1997

Safety is my highest transportation priority, and we cannot tolerate the loss of 40,000 lives each year on America’s highways, a tragedy affecting every community in our nation. As we prepare to launch a new campaign to make our streets and roads safer for all Americans, I ask for your participation.

The single most effective action we can take to save lives on America’s roadways is to increase seat belt use. In January of this year, I directed the Secretary of Transportation to work with members of Congress, the states, the automobile and insurance industries, safety and consumer groups, medical and health organizations, and concerned citizens all across the country to develop a plan that will save lives and reduce injuries on our highways. This past spring, Secretary Slater and I announced our plan, the Presidential Initiative for Increasing Seat Belt Use Nationwide.

Our initiative sets ambitious goals: increasing seat belt use to 85 percent and reducing child fatalities by 15 percent by the year 2000. The four major elements of the plan -- educating the public, building public-private partnerships, enacting strong legislation, and actively and visibly enforcing seat belt and child safety seat laws -- reinforce the work of concerned citizens who are mobilizing across the nation to increase seat belt use. This campaign is an opportunity for all Americans to take responsibility for the safety of their own communities.

As a father and a husband, I ask you to join me in taking this campaign for safe streets and highways to every American. Working together, we must encourage all Americans to wear seat belts and to secure children ages 12 and under in the back seat in a restraint system appropriate to their age and size -- every time and on every trip. Become a partner in the campaign to "Buckle Up America," making a personal commitment to always buckle up when traveling. Together, we can reach our goals to save lives and prevent injuries on America’s roadways.

[Signature]

Bill Clinton
Buckle Up America

Strategic Plan

Increasing the national seat belt use rate from the current 68 percent to 90 percent would prevent an estimated 5,536 deaths, 132,670 injuries, and save society $8.8 billion annually. But the numbers will not move on their own. To reach 90 percent seat belt use nationally, every state and community should be involved in Buckle Up America and every campaign needs to develop effective public-private partnerships. Here are the four key elements to embrace as we work together to Buckle Up America.

THE FOUR KEY ELEMENTS TO INCREASING SEAT BELT USE

1. Make Buckling Up a Priority. Increasing seat belt use is still the single most effective thing we can do to save lives and reduce injuries on American roadways.

2. Tailor the Campaign to Your Needs. No single approach will work in every state or community. Identify your needs and opportunities and then design your Buckle Up America effort to best meet those needs.

3. Use Messages That Work. Research shows that there are three key messages that move Americans to action. Use these key messages to help explain why Buckle Up America is so important to all of us.
   - Kids — Unbuckled drivers endanger kids by setting bad examples for them to follow. When a driver is unbuckled, 70 percent of the time so are children riding in that vehicle.
   - Costs — Unbuckled occupants cost us all money because we all pay for crash victims. Inpatient hospital care costs for unbuckled crash victims are 50 percent greater than for belted victims.
   - Everyone has a role — We all have a stake in this problem and we are all part of the solution. We must all buckle ourselves, buckle our children and call upon others to do the same.

4. Implement a Four-Part Strategy. In order to reach the national goals and the goals you identify at the state and community levels, we must concentrate our efforts on four tracks simultaneously.
   - Organize, Organize, Organize — Organizing strong partnerships is the heart of our work to achieve 90 percent seat belt use. We must educate citizens, create state and local partnerships, and broaden and activate these partnerships to pass stronger legislation, and support enforcement to achieve the goals of Buckle Up America.
   - Public Education — Generate visibility about Buckle Up America, your activities, and national and state goals. Remind others that the price for unbuckled occupants is too high, and that we all have a part to play in buckling up America.
   - Legislation — Work to pass primary (standard) seat belt laws in every state and close the gaps in child passenger safety laws to ensure that all children are covered in all seating positions.
   - Enforcement — Support local law enforcement’s efforts to seek compliance with the state’s seat belt and child passenger safety laws. Publicize your support of law enforcement’s efforts.
Buckle Up America

Key Messages

What motivates people to buckle up? What information helps others understand why everyone should ride buckled – on every trip? Research conducted for Buckle Up America shows that the following statements best summarize the critical messages that work to move people to action.

No matter what state you live in, these persuasive messages most often will be the same. These key messages can help guide your communications as you create state and local programs. And when questions arise about seat belts and child passenger safety issues, these key messages can help you answer them.

IT'S TIME TO BUCKLE UP

Seat Belts Are a Priority

Every hour someone dies in America simply because they didn't buckle up.

Failure to buckle up contributes to more fatalities than any other single traffic safety-related behavior.

Despite terrible traffic problems such as aggressive driving, increasing seat belt use is still the single most effective thing we can do to save lives and reduce injuries on America's roadways.

Protecting Kids

Adults who don't buckle up are sending children a deadly message that it is all right not to wear a seat belt. Children model adult behavior. Research shows that if a driver is unbuckled, 70 percent of the time children riding in that vehicle won't be buckled either.

Data suggests that education alone is not doing the job with young people, especially males ages 16 to 25 – the age group least likely to buckle up. They simply do not believe they will be injured or killed. Yet they are the nation’s highest-risk drivers, with more drunk driving, more speeding, and more crashes. Neither education nor fear of injury or death is strong enough to motivate this tough-to-reach group. Rather, it takes stronger seat belt laws and high visibility enforcement campaigns to get them to buckle up.

Saving Lives

Seat belts are the most effective safety devices in vehicles today, estimated to save 9,500 lives each year. Yet only 68 percent of the motor vehicle occupants are buckled. In 1996, more than 60 percent of the occupants killed in fatal crashes were unrestrained.

If 90 percent of Americans buckle up, we will prevent more than 5,500 deaths and 132,000 injuries annually.
The cost of unbuckled drivers and passengers goes beyond those killed and the loss to their families. We all pay for those who don't buckle up — in higher taxes, higher health care and higher insurance costs.

On average, inpatient hospital care costs for an unbelted crash victim are 50 percent higher than those for a belted crash victim. Society bears 85 percent of those costs, not the individuals involved. Every American pays about $580 a year toward the cost of crashes. If everyone buckled up, this figure would drop significantly.

By reaching the goal of 90 percent seat belt use, and 25 percent reduction in child fatalities by the year 2005, we will save $8.8 billion annually.

**Everyone Is Part of the Solution**

**Buckle Up America** is a broad, public-private partnership of community and health groups, safety advocates, businesses, law enforcement, legislators, public officials and concerned citizens. These partners realize that seat belts and child safety seats save lives and money. And because everyone is affected when others ride unbuckled, everyone must be a part of the solution.

**Legislation**

States with secondary enforcement laws average only 63 percent belt use. But states with primary (standard) enforcement seat belt laws average 78 percent belt use — 15 percentage points higher. Currently, only 13 states and the District of Columbia have primary seat belt enforcement laws.

Everyone would agree that protecting lives with seat belts is at least as important as a broken tail light or littering. Yet, while virtually every state has primary laws that allow law enforcement officers to stop and ticket a violator for having a broken tail light or for tossing trash out the window, not all states have primary laws for seat belt use.

State laws should explicitly require children to be in age- and size-appropriate child safety seats or seat belts. But many states currently have “gaps” in child passenger safety laws — holes that leave certain aged children vulnerable in certain seating positions. States should close these gaps to protect all children in all seating positions.

**High Visibility Enforcement**

Research shows that high visibility enforcement works because, with many part-time and non-belt users, the fear of a citation and significant fine outweighs their fear of being injured or killed in a crash.

When asked whether they support primary enforcement laws — laws that give the police the authority to stop and ticket an unbuckled driver just as they do other routine violations of the law like littering or driving with a broken tail light — the public overwhelming supports stronger laws. (Source: Public Opinion Strategies, July 1997)

During the past four years, when no new state laws were enacted and no widespread enforcement efforts were undertaken, national seat belt use has remained at just under 68 percent. But in those places that implemented high visibility enforcement programs, seat belt use rates increased dramatically.
Public Education

For the public to endorse Buckle Up America, they need to know why seat belts and child safety seats are so important and they need to understand the consequences we all face from those who don't buckle up. The best way to provide that information is through public education. To effectively and most widely educate people means using all the tools at the campaign's disposal — company newsletters, special events, media outreach and even one-on-one contacts between individuals. It's letting people know the dangerous and costly effects unbuckled occupants have on individual lives, families and society.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

But public education can do more than just inform. It can create an environment for change. By focusing on messages that work, public education can build public and political understanding and endorsement for local Buckle Up America partnerships and their efforts to pass stronger legislation and support enforcement.

It's this dynamic combination of stronger legislation, enforcement and public education that has proven effective in changing behavior. While public education may alter the attitudes of people who refuse to buckle up full time, it may not be enough to change their actions. When you combine public education with primary seat belt laws, enforcement and penalties, these people begin to buckle up and buckle up their children.

MESSAGES THAT MOVE THE PUBLIC: EVERYONE IS PAYING THE PRICE

Failure to buckle up affects everyone, not just those involved in a crash. It's important to keep that in mind when educating the public to support legislation and enforcement.

Families are paying the price. Every nine seconds someone is injured in a traffic crash. Every 13 minutes someone is killed.

Our children and young people are paying the price. Traffic-related injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults ages six to twenty-seven. Research also shows that minority youth are at even greater risk because they are less likely to be buckled up. And adult behavior affects children. Research shows that when a driver is unbuckled, 70 percent of the time children riding in that vehicle are unbuckled too.

Businesses are paying the price. On-the-job crashes are costing employers $22,000 per crash and $110,000 per injury due to lost productivity and higher insurance and medical costs.

Society is paying the price. Eighty-five percent of all medical costs of crash victims fall on society, not the individuals involved. Medicare, Medicaid and other taxpayer funded sources pay 24 percent of those costs. When crash victims are unbuckled, their medical treatment costs are 50 percent higher. Traffic-related injuries are the leading cause of all injury deaths in America. This problem is serious and it is immediate.
EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

Everyone can play a part to educate and urge those they know to buckle up. Community groups can use their existing communications tools – like newsletters or web sites – to spread the word. Businesses can hold safety meetings and implement strong seat belt policies as part of a comprehensive employee safety program.

And individuals can take part by setting the example. It is vital that all Americans protect themselves and their children by buckling up on each and every trip – whether it’s across the country, across town or to the neighborhood store – and talk to those they know about doing the same.

EVERYONE IS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Unlike many serious threats to public health, the solution to this problem is simple. It’s one click away. We must work together – as individuals, community members, public officials, business and health leaders and law enforcement officials – to educate those we touch to support those interventions proven to work in getting more children and adults buckled up. It means closing the gaps in child passenger safety laws, working for primary enforcement laws and supporting law enforcement’s efforts to save lives through strict compliance with the laws.

SET THE EXAMPLE AND EDUCATE

- Join the Buckle Up America partnership in your community.
- Buckle up.
- Buckle up everyone on every trip, regardless of whether it’s across the country or to the corner market.
- Instruct your children to always buckle up in other peoples’ vehicles.
- Ask and encourage friends, family and loved ones to buckle up and use child safety seats. Friends don’t let friends ride unbuckled.
- Require driving-age teenagers to buckle up themselves and to require their friends to do the same as a condition of driving your vehicle.
- Properly secure every child in a vehicle in a child safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt appropriate for the child’s age, height and weight.
- Seek assistance from law enforcement, fire & rescue and health specialists if unsure about the correct way to secure your child in a safety seat.
- Never put an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag.
- Always properly restrain children 12 and under in the back seat – the safest place in a vehicle.
- Work with advocacy groups and support strengthening seat belt and child passenger safety laws.
- Work with advocacy groups to support high visibility enforcement of seat belt and child passenger safety laws.
- Write to newspapers and television and radio station general managers supporting your partnership to increase safety belt and child safety seat use and law enforcement’s efforts to urge compliance with the seat belt and child passenger safety laws.
- Never allow anyone to ride in the bed of a pick-up truck.
Building Partnerships Business

THE COST TO EMPLOYERS

It pays for businesses to get involved in Buckle Up America. Crashes drive up costs for health and disability insurance and increase workers’ compensation expenses for employers. In 1994, on- and off-the-job traffic crashes cost American businesses an estimated $55 billion. And, traffic crashes are the leading cause of on-the-job deaths and injuries.

As community leaders and employers, you have the ability to educate many people. Your influence with others in the business community and with political leaders can help push for and shape stronger legislation and lend support for high visibility enforcement efforts.

What Your Business Can Do

- Join the Buckle Up America partnership in your community.
- Implement and enforce a comprehensive company-wide seat belt program and policy to protect your employees and their families.
- Become an active proponent for primary (standard) seat belt legislation and strengthening child passenger safety laws in your state. Remember that corporations, businesses and business associations have a strong voice in state legislatures.
- Team with local law enforcement and community members to support their efforts to improve seat belt use in the community.
- Donate merchandise or discount coupons that law enforcement officers could distribute to properly buckled occupants.
- Use your company’s internal and external communication methods to publicize Buckle Up America goals, achievements and success stories, and provide information about how others can get involved in Buckle Up America.
- Present a child passenger safety seat to every employee who gives birth to a child or adopts a child.
- Establish a Safe Communities coalition to address your Community’s motor vehicle crash and injury problems.
- Join the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) and participate in their “Belt America 2000” program.
- Work with the National Safety Council to raise awareness about seat belts within your company and community.
- Install “Seat Belts Buckled!” signs at the exits of company parking lots.
- Address business and civic groups on the benefits of seat belt and child safety seat use.

UNBUCKLED DRIVERS AND PASSENGERS COST BUSINESSES MONEY

- On-the-job crashes cost employers almost $22,000 per crash and $110,000 per injury.
- In one year, off-the-job crash injuries cost employers over $14 billion.*
- In one year, employer health care (medical) spending on crash injuries was nearly $9 billion. Another $9 billion was spent on sick leave and life and disability insurance for crash victims.*
- Inpatient hospital costs for unbelted crash victims are 50% higher than those for belted crash victims.

*NHTSA, Total Cost to Employers by State and Industry. December 1998
McDonald's - Supporting Law Enforcement

During Buckle Up America Week, 1997, McDonald's in Connecticut assisted law enforcement in protecting citizens by encouraging the use of seat belts and child safety seats. During law enforcement's efforts to gain compliance with the state seat belt and child passenger safety laws, McDonald's made available coupons to distribute to drivers and their passengers who were properly buckled. McDonald's believes that this positive reinforcement will help keep families safe and help spread the message that seat belts and child safety seats save lives.

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Company Seat Belt Policies

One of the most effective ways businesses can educate and show their support for increasing seat belt and child safety seat use is to establish or enhance a corporate occupant protection policy. In every state but one, it is the law for every driver to wear his or her seat belt. Your company's policy will help to keep all employees driving within the letter of the law. When writing or updating your company's seat belt policy, remember these four key points:

- Assess your company's current losses due to motor vehicle crashes.
- Establish and enforce a seat belt use requirement that has the full support of your executive management.
- Make sure your employees fully understand the policy.
- Regularly conduct employee seat belt use surveys and post the results.

UPS - Setting the Standard for Corporate America

With more than 302,000 employees across the country, UPS is the corporate seat belt leader in the package delivery field. Thirty years ago, UPS installed seat belts in its vehicles as a commitment to driver safety. It has since created a comprehensive driver training program and seat belt policy, and as a result, all drivers wear their seat belts. UPS now has a zero-tolerance seat belt policy for its drivers. "If the wheels are in motion, the driver must be secured by a seat belt," says a company driver.

Despite the fact that a UPS driver gets in and out of a vehicle more than 100 times per day, he or she must wear a seat belt at all times. Since implementing the seat belt policy, UPS driver fatality and injury rates have steadily declined.

*UPS and the UPS logo are registered trademarks of United Parcel Service of America, Inc. Used by permission.

PROMOTE YOUR COMPANY'S POLICY

Promote your company's seat belt policy to ensure that employees are aware of it and are following company rules. You can reinforce your seat belt policy by publicizing it in company brochures, flyers, and in pay envelopes or posting the policy on bulletin boards and distributing information at meetings and company gatherings.
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