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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MICHIGAN SEAT BELT USE HIGHEST IN THE NATION NHTSA confirms 97.2% rate tops in 2008

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has officially confirmed that Michigan's 97.2 percent seat belt use rate was highest in the nation for 2008. The figure is also a record high for the state.

Michigan's seat belt use has been steadily climbing since the state's primary enforcement law took effect in March 10, 2000. Under the secondary enforcement law, belt use peaked at about 70 percent. In 2004, Michigan reached the 90 percent mark, making it the first state east of the Rockies to achieve that milestone.

Further increases came after law enforcement officers began using safety belt enforcement zones during the annual May mobilization. Before zones, most motorists assumed traffic stops were for speeding. Zones are designed to ensure drivers recognize periods of increased safety belt enforcement. Signs alert motorists to the zone area and officers all work a designated roadway.

The state's increasing belt use has contributed to a decline in traffic deaths as well. In 1999 Michigan experienced 1,386 traffic deaths. In 2007, that number was at 1,084. Figures for 2008 are not yet available.

Direct observation surveys are conducted periodically throughout the year by the Wayne State University Transportation Research Group with grant funding provided by the Office of Highway Safety Planning.

Belt use is only slightly lower in pickup trucks, 96 percent, compared to passenger vehicles, minivans and sport utility vehicles. Men have somewhat lower belt use rates as well, 96.3 percent compared to 98.2 percent for women. Male pick-up truck occupants continue to have the lowest rates of seat belt use (95.5%), followed by male passenger car occupants (96.2%).

2008 Seat Belt Use Rates

1. Michigan 97.2
2. Hawaii 97.0
3. Washington State 96.5
4. Oregon 96.0
5. California 95.7

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