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## **Click It or Ticket - HPD Urges Motorists to Wear Seatbelts**

Harrisonburg, Va. Thousands of law enforcement officers from across Virginia and the country are stepping up enforcement during the 2014 Click It or Ticket national mobilization from May 19 to June 1. The Harrisonburg Police Department will be adding patrols the next two weeks with a focus on unrestrained drivers and passengers, as well as other traffic infractions.

Last year in Virginia there were 310 unrestrained fatalities, which was 54 percent of all fatalities in vehicles equipped with safety restraints. Fatalities for unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants went up for the first time in five years in the U.S. in 2012 when 10,335 unbuckled passenger vehicle occupants died.

Seat belts are the best defense in a crash and save thousands of lives every year. In 2012 in the United States, seat belts saved an estimated 12,174 people from dying. From 2008 through 2012 seat belts saved nearly 63,000 lives across the country.

Virginia law requires seat belt use for drivers and front seat passengers 18 years of age and older. Passengers within the vehicle younger than 18 need to be in a seat belt or safety seat system, and since this law is considered primary, officers don't need another reason to stop a vehicle if they believe there is an individual under the age of 18 who is not properly restrained. "If you're not buckled up, you will get a ticket," warned HPD Officer Daniel Long. "Everyone, no matter if they are a driver or passenger, should always buckle up," Long added.

Additionally, HPD will be focused on at-risk groups when it comes to seat belt use - those who drive and ride in pickup trucks, and young adults. Nationwide, 66 percent of pickup truck occupants who were killed were not buckled up. Those driving trucks may feel that their large vehicle will protect them more than other vehicles in a crash, but this proves to be a false assumption as unrestrained drivers and passengers are often thrown around within the roomy cabs of a truck - and sometimes out the windshield and windows.

*Harrisonburg*  
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Also, young adults are dying at a disproportionate rate because they are not wearing their seat belts. In the U.S. in 2012, 62 percent of 18- to 34-year-old passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were not wearing belts. Here in the Commonwealth in 2013, 118 (38 percent) of those who died in unrestrained crashes were 21 to 35 years old.

"Though these highway safety campaigns such as Click It or Ticket, we can focus education and enforcement efforts to try and change attitudes and habits in regards to seat belt use," states HPD Traffic Sergeant Pete Ritchie, Jr.

Department pre- and post-seat belt surveys completed with each safety campaign shows motorists in Harrisonburg have always been 10 percent or more than the state average in seat belt usage. " That data means the message is getting through locally. However, HPD officers did write over 600 summons for seat belt related infractions in 2013 - so we still have work to do." Ritchie added.

The Harrisonburg Police Department along with DMV's Virginia Highway Safety Office encourages everyone on the road to wear their seat belts during every trip, day and night.