

# **Delaware General Health District**

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*A Safe Communities Grantee of the Ohio Department of Public Safety*

# NEWS RELEASE

## **UNUSED SEAT BELTS BLAMED FOR TWO NOVEMBER CRASH FATALITIES**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DELAWARE, Oh., Dec. 18, 2009** – Failure to wear seat belts caused the deaths of two teen-agers in a recent late-night crash in rural Delaware County, crash investigators believe.

The teens were riding in a car which skidded off Klondike Road, a curvy, narrow township road alongside the Scioto River, on the night of Nov. 28. The victims, aged 18 and 15, were thrown from the vehicle. Investigating Troopers from the Ohio Highway Patrol said they probably would have walked away if they had been wearing seat belts.

That accident accounted for two of the three highway deaths recorded in Delaware County during November, the Delaware County Safe Communities Coalition reports.

Highway safety studies show overwhelming links between seat belt usage and crash survival. Studies also show that young drivers are the most likely to be in crashes.

The 2008 *Traffic Crash Facts* published by the Ohio Department of Public Safety shows that only 38.9 percent of crash fatality victims were wearing seat belts or other restraints. That report also shows that more than 20 percent of the fatality victims were ejected from their vehicles, and that rarely happens when people wear seat belts.

The 2009 *Observational Survey of Seat Belt Usage in Ohio* found that 83.6 percent of vehicle occupants were wearing seat belts, up 0.9 percent from 2008. Delaware General Health District staff members were among dozens of roadside observers who collected data for that report, staking out five local intersections and tallying seat belt usage by all passers-by. Fortunately, those annual surveys have showed fairly steady improvements in seat belt usage since 2000 throughout most segments of our population.

Police officers also observe seat belt usage, and can cite vehicle occupants for failure to wear belts. Delaware Municipal Court Clerk records show that about 2,500 seat belt violation tickets were issued in Delaware County last year – an average of nearly seven per day.

The Observational Survey, prepared by Miami University’s Applied Research Center, identified six specific groups whose seat belt usage rates lagged in 2008: Southeast Ohioans, persons aged 15-25, children aged 5-14, males, pickup truck occupants, and African-Americans.

The 2008 *Traffic Crash Facts* reported that drivers aged 16-20, compared to all other age groups, accounted for more deaths, more injury accidents, more property damage accidents, and the highest percentage of “driver in error” accidents (by a wide margin). Drivers aged 16-20 also were among the most likely to be uninsured in a crash.

Here in Delaware County, 84 percent of adults responding to our 2007 health behavior survey said they always wear seat belts, up from 81 percent in 2002. Among the sixth- through ninth-graders who took part in our 2005 youth health behavior survey, 56 percent said they always wear seat belts and 27 percent said they do so most of the time.

That survey showed a 71 percent seat belt usage rate among sixth graders but only 47 percent among 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Unfortunately, other risky health behaviors such as tobacco and alcohol usage show similar rises during those adolescent years.

The Safe Communities program was developed through the Ohio Department of Public Safety to encourage community safety partnerships throughout Ohio.