

[Products Liability Law Daily Wrap Up, NHTSA NEWS—MOTOR VEHICLE EQUIPMENT—NHTSA seeks comments on information collection relating to seat belt usage in fatal crashes, \(Oct. 4, 2021\)](#)

Products Liability Law Daily Wrap Up

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By Susan Engstrom

The data will assist the agency in planning seat belt program activities, supporting groups involved in improving public safety, and identifying countermeasure strategies that are most acceptable and effective in increasing seat belt use.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is inviting public input on its intention to request approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for a new information collection titled “Fatal Crash Seat Belt Use Reporting and Awareness.” Comments are due by November 29, 2021 (*NHTSA Notice*, [86 FR 53727](#), September 28, 2021).

Background. In 2018, 22,697 occupants of passenger vehicles (passenger cars, pickup trucks, vans, and SUVs) died in motor vehicle crashes in the United States. Of those killed where restraint status was known, 47 percent were unrestrained at the time of the fatal crash. NHTSA estimates that seat belts saved the lives of 14,955 passenger vehicle occupants age five and older in 2017 (latest data available), and, if all passenger vehicle occupants age five and older had worn seat belts, an additional 2,549 lives could have been saved.

The proposed information collection would support NHTSA's efforts to increase occupant protection by examining factors related to seat belt use. Previous research in this area indicated that news organizations may not report seat belt use in many of the driving fatalities they cover. That said, the research conducted previously involved data from 1999 through 2002, which may be out of date with current practices. Many stakeholders assume that increased reporting of seat belt usage in fatal crashes, especially when seat belts were not worn, could increase seat belt use. In addition, when seat belt status has been reported in a news report, it is not clear that individuals are paying attention. Improving awareness of seat belt status, particularly involving unbelted fatalities, may be an effective countermeasure that may encourage individuals to wear seat belts.

Information collection. NHTSA proposes to collect information from 1,500 participants from two seat belt user groups-750 who are full-time and 750 who are occasional or non-users-for a one-time voluntary experiment to understand whether the inclusion of seat belt status in a fatal crash news report could affect seat belt use. The agency will contact a sample of 20,850 potential participants from a marketing research firm's panel with an invitation email and screening questions to identify adult volunteers who regularly drive a passenger vehicle.

The experiment involves a 40-question online survey that participants will complete in their own homes using their personal computers. Participants will read one of three fictitious news reports of crashes (some of which involve fatalities) to gauge whether including seat belt use in news reports has the potential to increase seat belt use by occasional and non-seat belt users. After reading the news report, participants will report their: (1) recollection of seat belt use in the news report they read; (2) self-reported seat belt use; (3) intentions to use seat belts; (4) attitudes about seat belts; and (5) demographic information.

The collection will not involve recordkeeping or disclosure. An approved Institutional Review Board (IRB), Advarra, has reviewed the study and determined that the research project is exempt from IRB oversight. NHTSA will summarize the results of the collection using aggregate statistics in a final report to be distributed to NHTSA program and regional offices, state highway safety offices, and other traffic safety stakeholders. This collection will inform the development of countermeasures, particularly in the areas of communications and outreach, for increasing seat belt use and reducing fatalities and injuries associated with the lack of seat belt use.

Burden hours and estimates. The total estimated burden associated with reporting is 1,057 hours. Recruiting participants for the experiment has an estimated burden of 348 hours for the invitation email and 70 hours for the screening questions. (An estimated 20 percent of the invited potential participants will be interested in participating in the study and will complete the screener form-i.e., 4,170 potential participants.) An estimated 1,668 potential participants will read the consent form with an estimated burden of 139 hours. The 1,500 participants will complete the experiment with an estimated burden of 500 hours. NHTSA estimates that there will be no costs to respondents beyond the time spent participating in the study.

Comments. The public is invited to comment on any aspect of the information collection, including: (1) whether the proposed collection is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Department of Transportation (DOT), including whether the information will have practical utility; (2) the accuracy of DOT's estimate of the burden of the proposed information collection; (3) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) ways to minimize the burden of the collection on respondents, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

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