

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Failure to Buckle Up Changed Teen's Life *'Click it. Or ticket.'* enforcement set for *May 20-June 2 across Kansas*

TOPEKA, Kan. – The difference between wearing a seatbelt and not wearing a seatbelt was dramatically portrayed on Thursday as two crash survivors spoke at an event announcing a special seatbelt enforcement period across Kansas taking place later this month.

Ginger Park, who works for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, stood at a podium in the Topeka Joint Law Enforcement Center and described how she was uninjured in a crash several years ago. The vehicle she was riding in spun violently out of control and off the road, and ended up coming to rest on the passenger side. No one was injured.

"My husband and I both wore our seatbelts, and neither one of us had a scratch," Park said. "Seatbelts saved an estimated 12,000 lives in 2011. That same year, more than half of the 22,000 vehicle occupants killed in crashes nationwide were not wearing seatbelts."

In contrast, [Heather Tice](#) spoke from a wheelchair. She described how, at age 15, her neck was broken while riding as a passenger in a car that crashed while avoiding an oncoming vehicle at the crest of a hill on a rural road.

“I was tossed around in the back seat like a rag doll,” Tice told reporters, law enforcement officers, and highway safety officials at the media event. “I will be in this chair for the rest of my life.”

Kansas Highway Patrol, county sheriffs’ offices and city police departments across the state will be adding extra shifts from May 20-June 2 specifically to issue tickets for failure to wear seatbelts, said Shawnee County Sheriff Herman Jones.

“We will be following the hard and fast rule that if you don’t wear a seatbelt, you’ll receive a citation,” Jones said.

Jones noted that after Kansas legislators passed an adult primary seatbelt law in 2010, seatbelt usage rose from 77 percent to 83 percent in 2011.

“Our goal is 100 percent,” Jones said. “As law enforcement, we’re going to be on the front end of this so that what happened to Heather won’t happen again.”

Jenny Scheve, a trauma center nurse, accompanied Tice. Scheve and Tice work with ThinkFirst, an injury prevention program through which speakers discuss the consequences of traumatic injury and urge others to make safe choices.

“Brain and spinal cords are made of nerve tissue that does not regenerate,” Scheve said. “Any injury that occurs to these areas because someone didn’t wear a seatbelt will cause a long and difficult recovery.”

Scheve described how people with brain or spinal cord injuries essentially begin life over again, drooling like babies because they do not know how to swallow or being confined to a wheelchair because they are unable to walk.

“When a crash victim arrives in the trauma center, we literally put a tube in every orifice of your body,” Scheve said. “Others will have to care for your every need. These injuries are horrific.”

Tice described how her spinal cord injury paralyzed her and changed her life, requiring years of medical treatment and rehabilitation.

“These injuries don’t discriminate,” she said. “It isn’t about age difference or how smart you are or what you do.”

Tice urged young adults like herself to think of others whenever they get into a car.

“The most selfless thing you can do is buckle up, because if you are injured or die, your family is left to deal with it,” Tice said.

Jones added that drivers stopped for failure to wear a seatbelt sometimes ask why law enforcement officers aren’t out catching “real criminals.”

“We’ve noticed that real criminals sometimes don’t wear seatbelts, either,” Jones said. “We’ll stop someone for not wearing a seatbelt and discover that they are on the run from the law.”

Scheve said it takes three seconds to click a seatbelt, a simple habit that can save a life. She also said she took a slightly different view from the traffic campaign theme line, “Click it. Or ticket.”

“Click it or nix it, I like to say, because failure to wear a seatbelt can end your life, or at least change your life, and change everything you want to do in life,” Scheve said.

Further information about Kansas seat belt enforcement can be found at www.facebook.com/DriveSafeKansas or www.twitter.com/DriveSafeKansas.

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