

RURAL SEAT BELT SURVEY

2004 Summary Report

For every 100 unbelted occupants who died in a given year, as many as 60 of them may have lived if they had simply worn their seat belt.

IT'S A FACT

At 50 km/h, an unrestrained vehicle occupant weighing 80 kg (176 lbs.) will strike whatever it hits first with a force of 2,785 kg (6,215 lbs.)¹. This impact usually results in one of two things: death, or life-long severe disability such as spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury.

Road safety research proves that seat belts are highly effective in preventing death and serious injury to vehicle occupants involved in potentially fatal collisions – up to 60% depending on the vehicle type and size, and where the occupant is seated². This means that for every 100 unbelted occupants who died in a given year, as many as 60 of them may have lived if they had simply worn their seat belt.

The evidence is clear, seat belts are the single most cost effective life saving device currently available and offer the best protection against death and injury in the event of a crash. Yet a small percentage of Albertans still choose not to wear a seat belt or use child safety seats.

Data shows that the percentage of seat belt users is lowest in rural Alberta³. This is also where the majority of fatal collisions occur⁴. Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) “K” Division data indicates that approximately 90% of fatal collisions occur in RCMP jurisdictions, with unbelted occupants accounting for approximately 50% of these deaths⁵.

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Partners in traffic safety and injury prevention are collectively working with the Alberta Occupant Restraint Program (AORP) to address the non-use of seat belts in rural areas. AORP’s goal is to achieve a 95 percent seat belt wearing rate by 2010. This is consistent with the goals of the National Road Safety Vision 2010, to have the safest roads in the world by 2010. Organizations participating in AORP have developed communication, education, and enforcement strategies to encourage all Albertans to buckle up.

The Alberta Rural Seat Belt Survey is a key tool to determine how effective these collective efforts are in reaching the goal of 95 percent seat belt and child safety seat use.

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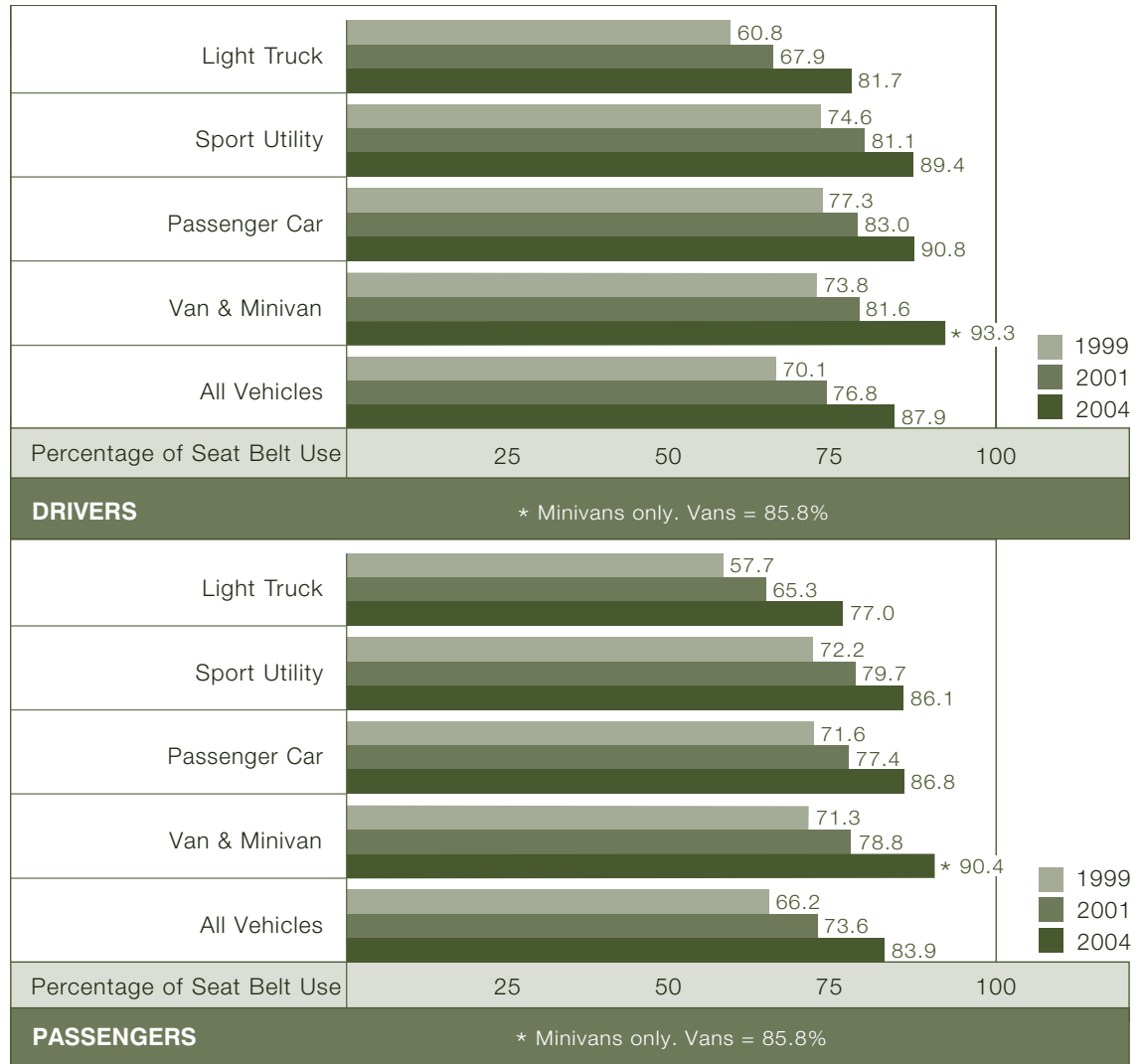
In 2004, the overall prevalence of seat belt wearing in rural Alberta was 87.1%. This represents an 11% increase over 2001, and an 18% increase since 1999.

HIGHLIGHTS

To gauge the impact that the various initiatives in the strategy are having on seat belt wearing rates in rural areas, an observational survey of seat belt use in rural Alberta was conducted in 1999 and repeated in 2001 and again in 2004. The results are encouraging. By 2001, the prevalence of seat belt use for drivers and right front seat passengers in rural Alberta* had risen from 69.2% to 76.1% - an increase of nearly 7%. In 2004, the overall prevalence was 87.1%. This represents an 11% increase over 2001, and an 18% increase since 1999.

* "rural areas" are defined as communities with a population of less than 25,000

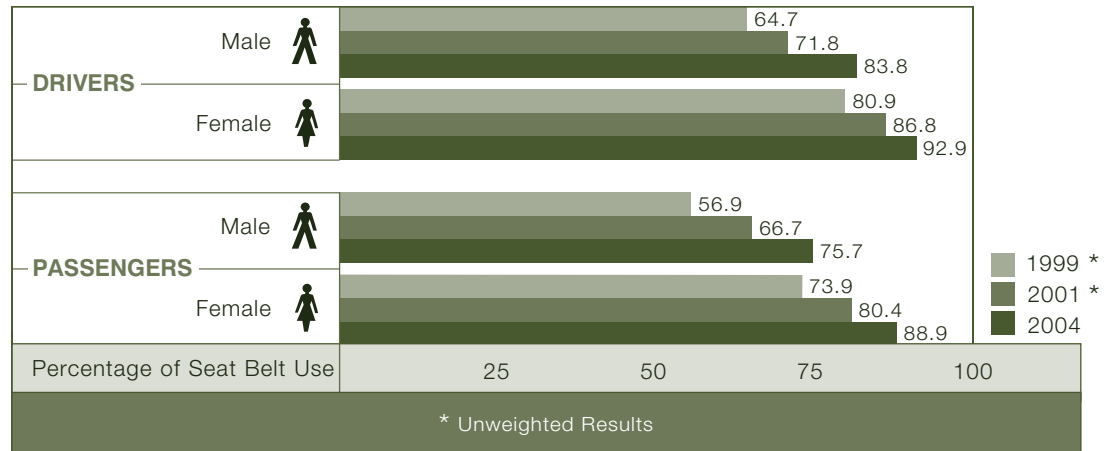
Seat Belt Use By Type of Vehicle 1999, 2001 & 2004



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Minivans and passenger cars have the highest driver and passenger wearing rates compared with other vehicle types (93.3% and 90.8% respectively for drivers; 90.4% and 86.8% for passengers). Drivers and passengers of light trucks have the lowest wearing rates (81.7% for drivers; 77.0% for passengers).

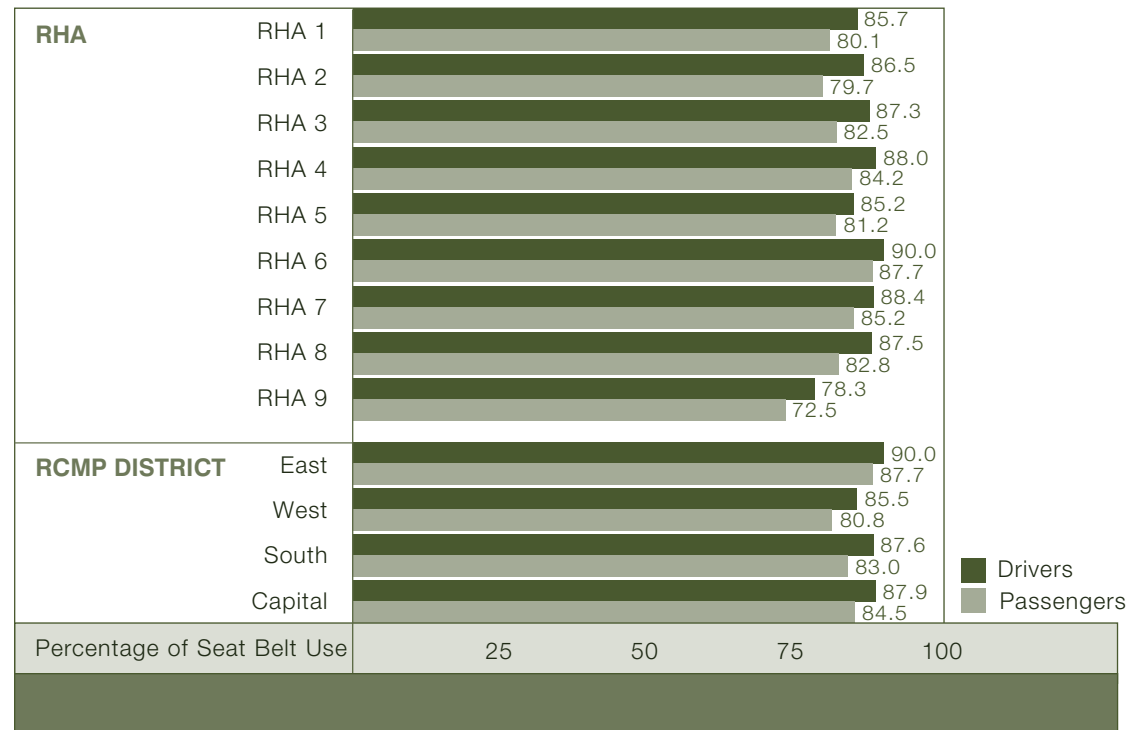
Seat Belt Use By Gender: 1999, 2001, & 2004



The overall seat belt wearing rate is lower for passengers (83.9%) than for drivers (87.9%). The wearing rate for male drivers (83.8%) is lower than for female drivers (92.9%). The same is true for male passengers, who have a wearing rate of 75.7%, compared 88.9% for female passengers.

Seat Belt Use For All Vehicle Types

[in Alberta's Regional Health Authorities and RCMP Districts]



The lowest rates of rural seat belt use are found in Alberta's northern-most region, Health Region #9 (Northern Lights). In this region, 78.3% of drivers and 72.5% of right front passengers were observed wearing their seat belt.

Those who fail to stop at a stop sign are less likely to be wearing a seat belt than those who come to a full stop (82.6% vs. 88.9% for drivers and 78.9% vs. 85.2% for passengers).

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the past five years, significant progress has been made in increasing seat belt wearing rates in rural communities, but achieving a 95% seat belt wearing rate across the province will not be easy. New messages and approaches will need to be developed to reach people who have not yet been convinced of the need to use seat belts and child passenger restraints. Information from the Alberta Rural Seat Belt Survey will continue to provide traffic safety partners with important information about where to target their efforts. If measures are successful, the economic burden of injuries related to non use of seat belts in Alberta would be reduced by up to \$475 million⁶ and thousands of Albertans would be spared from needless injury and death.

THANK YOU

This survey would not have been possible without the partnership of local RCMP, regional health professionals, and the hundreds of volunteers in communities where the survey was conducted. The success of the survey demonstrates effective collaboration between education, enforcement, and awareness. The partners in the Alberta Occupant Restraint Program would like to express sincere appreciation for their efforts.

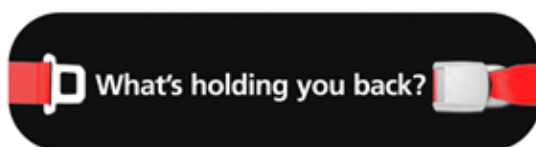
For more information on AORP and the Alberta Rural Seat Belt Survey contact the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research at (780) 492-6019 or acicr@ualberta.ca

This report is available on-line at:

www.saferoads.com

www.med.ualberta.ca/acicr

www.health-in-action.org/aorp



AORP PARTNERS

- Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research
- Alberta Health and Wellness
- Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation
- Insurance Bureau of Canada
- KIDSAFE Connection
- Municipal police services
- Calgary Police Service
- Edmonton Police Service
- Regional Health Authorities
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- St. John Ambulance
- Transport Canada

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Alberta Occupant Restraint Program. (2002). Alberta rural seat belt survey 2004. Edmonton: Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research.

If more Albertans were to wear their seat belt, the economic burden of injuries in Alberta could be reduced by up to \$475 million and thousands of lives would be saved.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Alberta Occupant Restraint Program. (2002). Fact sheet – the importance of seat belt use. The fall 2002 Alberta seat belt awareness campaign. Edmonton: Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research.
- ² Alberta Occupant Restraint Program. (2001). Rural seat belt use: 1999 and 2001 summary report. Edmonton: Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Alberta Transportation. (2003). Alberta traffic collision statistics 2003. Edmonton: Alberta Transportation.
- ⁵ RCMP “K” Division. (2004). Traffic Collision Database, unpublished.
- ⁶ Alberta Occupant Restraint Program. (2001). Rural seat belt use: 1999 and 2001 summary report. Edmonton: Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research.

