



Friends: I'm hoping you will assist me in gathering some data on a task I have taken on. It involves the number of officers killed in traffic crashes who are not wearing seat belts.

I have made contact with ZF (formerly TRW), one of the leading providers of driver restraints and airbag technology, and have found that they are very interested in improving the safety of law enforcement officers. Here's what I have been able to acquire thus far:

Wearing seat belts is the law (nationally) but there are several states that provide for exemption by law enforcement officers. Michigan is not among those that specifically exempt police

Between 2012-2016, there were 152 deaths caused by traffic crashes and 47% of those killed were not wearing seat belts

Most of the past twenty years have seen traffic crashes as the leading cause of on-duty deaths

Most officers, when asked, answer that they choose not to wear the restraint system because of concern for:

Gun getting tangled on exit

Releasing the belt delays their exit

The restraint system hampers their ability to dodge a bullet that comes into the car

While seat belts first became required for front-seat outboard passengers in 1967, they were not required to be worn until 1985. At that time, approximately 45% of drivers wore the belt. In 2000, when seat belt use became a "primary offense", the average went up to 83.5%. By 2009, Michigan reported over 95% of drivers wore their belts (#1 in the USA).

The problem we are seeking to solve is that use by police officers is reported to be closer to 50%. Wearing the belt has been mandatory since 1985 which would mean, if you were born in 1969 and got your license at 16, the excuse of "old habits die hard" is not enough.



ZF is interested in hearing from me (you!) as to what can be done to get us past the usual excuse for not wearing your belt. You should know that your airbags are designed to work WITH the seat belt. Believe me, an unrestrained driver coming towards the airbag at impact is not going to be as safe as he/she would have been while restrained. Perhaps, with your input, ZF's specialists will be able to determine if the release needs to be moved forward/backward or even upward. Perhaps the release needs a different kind of button. I remember when the Viper had shoulder/lap belts that pulled from the center of the car towards the door. It helped in getting out. Obviously, that was a two-passenger car. This may be less practical in our patrol cars. ZF has already worked to create an airbag design to accommodate side-marker lights. There's a lot going on in the front seat of these patrol cars with computers, radars, radios, etc., and our officers are wearing more equipment on their person than would ever have been imagined.

Tell me why you feel more comfortable without your belt on. Tell me what changes might cause you to go back to wearing one. I promise you that your message/identify/opinion will be shared with no one. Send your thoughts to me at jat@poam.net. If the email system concerns you, call me at 313-937-9000. I'm just trying to filter out those who don't do your job from tipping the scale.

Thanks for your time. **And put that belt on!!!**

Jim Tignanelli