



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Police officers often share their experiences with each other. It is a way to pass on knowledge and advice, but also it can help us to cope with some of the more difficult situations we deal with. I would like to share a story that one of the officers I work with at APD shared with me recently.

“It was one of those calls that I had a bad feeling about even before I arrived on scene; a single vehicle accident with multiple injuries on a Saturday night, in July. I was the first officer to arrive. The scene was all too familiar to me. I didn’t recognize the car because of the damage. There were two people in the vehicle who were injured but were conscious and responsive. They would survive. Both were wearing their seatbelts. The driver had been ejected and was laying motionless on the edge of the road, quite a distance from the vehicle. As I approached it was clear the young man did not survive; and then, a wave of shock and nausea overwhelmed me, as I suddenly realized who it was. We had played tennis earlier in the day and now, at 17 years of age, his life had ended, needlessly. The investigation concluded he would have survived if he had been wearing his seatbelt, but tragically, he wasn’t. 30 years later his parents are still alive, but their loss continues to haunt them each and every day. Like I they can only wonder “What if...?””

To this day the officer who attended this tragedy is saddened by the fact this death was preventable.

Did you know your survival rate of being ejected from a vehicle is 5 times lower than a person who is not ejected. **SEATBELTS SAVE LIVES.** The Province of Nova Scotia recognized this fact in 1985, by amending the Motor Vehicle Act, making seatbelt use mandatory. 28 years later, in spite of the legal requirements, the countless deaths and injuries, there are those who continue to travel in their vehicles without using their seatbelts.

The Motor Vehicle Act requires everyone 16 years or older who is the driver or passenger of a motor vehicle to wear a seatbelt. The fine for drivers and passengers convicted of this offence is \$169.91. Drivers are also required to ensure any persons under the age of 16 is wearing a seatbelt or in a child restraint system.

Children are required to ride in a rear facing car seats until they are a minimum of 22 pounds and at least one year of age. Children over 22 pounds but less than 40 pounds, over one year in age must ride in an appropriate car seat whether it is front or rear facing. Children over 40 pounds must ride in an appropriate booster seat until they are at least 9 years old, or a minimum of four feet 9 inches tall.

While many vehicles are equipped with air bags, this does not replace a seat belt. I have been to many accident scenes where there has been no doubt in my mind that the seatbelt had saved the lives of the people inside a wrecked vehicle.

In a collision when your vehicle is stopped by the other object, your body continues to travel at the same speed. You are stopped when the body collides with something, whether it is the windshield, the steering wheel or the dash. A seat belt that is properly worn will prevent this from happening.

Properly worn means having both straps stretched snugly across your shoulder bones and hip bones. These are areas of your body which are able to withstand the tremendous forces of a hard collision. By wearing only the shoulder belt, you are running the risk of slipping out of the belt and having it strangle you. By wearing a lap belt only, your upper body is still prone to slamming into the steering wheel.

I have heard people say they don't wear their seat belt because they are scared that it will trap them inside the vehicle when there is a fire or it becomes submerged in water. But statistics show that the percentage of vehicle accidents which require a quick exit is low. Research has also identified, the ability to exit a vehicle involved in an accident decreases when occupants are incapacitated by injuries which are a result of not wearing a seatbelt.

A common explanation provided by motorists I have stopped for not wearing their seat belt is they were only travelling a short distance to their home. Statistics show that a significant percentage of traffic fatalities occur a short distance from the drivers home and typically at low speeds. Keep this in mind when you are traveling to the local grocery store and you think that it won't hurt this "one time" since you are only going a short distance.

One of the goals of the Amherst Police Department is to prevent injuries and deaths which are a result of motor vehicle accidents. The enforcement of the seat belt laws is one of the strategies we use to achieve this goal. I am passionate about seat belt usage. Every time I have told someone to buckle up, I feel I have improved their chances of surviving an accident or reduced their risk of injury.

I hope I am never again required to tell another Mother, Father, husband, wife, companion, son or daughter that their loved one is not coming home. So please, wear your seatbelt, and insist that everyone in the vehicle does the same.