

NHTSA Proposes Seat Belt Warning System Expansion to Encourage Drivers and Passengers to Buckle Up

Proposed rule would require enhanced seat belt warnings for rear and front driver and passenger side seats

August 21, 2023 | Washington, DC

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has issued a [proposed rule](#) which requires automobile manufacturers to equip vehicles with seat belt use warning systems for the right front passenger and rear seats to increase seat belt use. The new requirements would apply to passenger cars, trucks, most buses, and multipurpose passenger vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less.

"Wearing a seat belt is one of the most effective ways to prevent injury and death in a crash," NHTSA Acting Administrator Ann Carlson said. "In 2021, almost 43,000 people lost their lives on America's roads, and half of those in vehicles were unbelted. This proposed rule can help reduce that number by getting more to buckle up."

Seat belt warning systems use visual and audible alerts to encourage seat belt use. The proposed rule would amend Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 208 "Occupant Crash Protection," which currently requires a seat belt warning for the driver's seat but does not require a warning for other seating positions. The proposed rule would also update current driver seat belt warning system requirements.

NHTSA's proposed rule would implement the following requirements for rear seats:

- A visual warning on vehicle startup lasting at least 60 seconds to notify the driver of the status of the rear seat belts.
- An audio-visual change-of-status warning lasting at least 30 seconds if a rear seat belt is unbuckled while the vehicle is in operation.

NHTSA's proposed rule would also implement the following requirements for front seats:

- An audio-visual seat belt use warning for the right front passenger's seat.
- An audio-visual seat belt use warning for the driver and right front passenger seat that remains active until both the driver and right front passenger seat occupants are belted.
- An audio-visual change-of-status warning for both the driver and right front passenger seats that remains active until the unfastened seat belt is refastened.

Manufacturers would have the flexibility to adjust warning signal characteristics – such as frequency and volume – to make the warning both effective and acceptable to vehicle owners.

NHTSA estimates that the proposed requirements would prevent approximately 300 non-fatal injuries and over 100 fatalities annually. While seat belt use is much higher than it was a decade ago, there is room for improvement. Usage rates for rear seat passengers have consistently been below those for the front seats. For rear seat occupants, seat belts reduce the risk of fatality by 55% for passenger cars and 74% for light trucks and vans. For front seat occupants, seat belts reduce the risk of fatality by 44% for passenger cars and 63% to 73% for light trucks and vans.

This proposed rule seeks to establish industry-wide consistency to improve seat belt use and save lives. In 2019, NHTSA published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on a variety of issues related to potential rear seat belt warning requirements. The feedback from the 45 comments received was incorporated into the development of the newly issued NPRM.

In January 2022, USDOT released the [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#), a roadmap to address the national crisis in motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries.

DOT also launched the next phase of the NRSS, the [Call to Action campaign](#), and released a 1-year progress report with accompanying data visualizations that highlight the extent and magnitude of the U.S. roadway safety problem and ways to eventually bring the number of deaths on our roadways to zero.

NHTSA will be taking public comment on the proposed rule for 60 days. [Please click here](#) to learn more about the rulemaking process.

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