

Seat Belt Safety

I tell people every day that I have the best job in the world. Where else can your work consist of helping people and making people safer almost all of the time? My Grandfather had told me once that "if you love your job you'll never go to work." All that means is that it won't feel like work because you enjoy it so much. I guess it's true because I was approached in the City Hall parking lot one day, like so many other times, by an individual who was confused by a law and I had an opportunity to help. This individual stated that he had been pulled over for a seat belt violation. He further stated that the officer treated him very polite and was a complete professional, but he was confused because he had, in fact, been wearing his seat belt. I thought I knew where the story was going and once we got a little further in I found that I was right. The gentleman was not wearing his seatbelt properly. And like so many times in my career it was not out of malicious intent just an honest ignorance of the law. As we spoke the idea of adding this topic to the many that I write about on a weekly basis came up. He gladly agreed and I thanked him for giving me yet another subject to help inform the public on.

The South Carolina seat belt law reads as follows:
South Carolina's safety belt law requires that every driver and every occupant of a motor vehicle, when it is being operated on the public streets and highways of this State, must wear a fastened safety belt that complies with all provisions of federal law for its use. The driver is charged with the responsibility of requiring every occupant 17 years of age or younger to wear a safety belt or be secured in a child restraint system as required by law. However, a driver is not responsible for an occupant 17 years of age or younger who has a driver's license, special restricted license, or beginner's permit and who is not wearing a safety belt.

The part that applies to this gentleman, and others, is "must wear a fastened safety belt that complies with all provisions of federal law for its use". A safety belt must be worn in the way it was designed to be worn. If not it will fail to offer the protection it is intended to give. A seat belts main function is to:

- Prevent ejection,
- Shift crash forces to the strongest parts of the body's structure,
- Spread forces over a wide area of the body,
- Allow the body to slow down gradually,
- Protect the head and spinal cord.

If the shoulder strap is worn below the left arm or around the back it doesn't spread the force to the chest or keep you in your seat. To get the most benefit out of your seat belt, you should wear it low over the pelvis with the bottom edge touching the tops of the thighs. The shoulder belt should be worn over the shoulder and across the chest, not under the arm and over the abdomen. Make certain that the shoulder belt is not worn so loosely that it slides off your shoulder. Pregnant women should wear the lap belt below the abdomen and the shoulder belt above the belly. Wearing the shoulder strap behind you increases the risk of facial and head injuries in a collision.

From the desk of Officer Marshall Morehead

There are a few exceptions to the law. The law does not apply to:

- A driver or occupant who possesses a written verification from a physician that he is unable to wear a safety belt for physical or medical reasons;
- Medical or rescue personnel attending to injured or sick individuals in an emergency vehicle when operating in an emergency situation as well as the injured or sick individuals;
- School, church, or day care buses;
- Public transportation vehicles except taxis;
- Occupants of vehicles in parades;
- United States mail carriers;
- An occupant for which no seat belt is available because all belts are being used by other occupants;
- A driver or occupants in a vehicle not originally equipped with safety belts.

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Hopefully this will help alleviate some of the confusion surrounding this issue and help everyone become more informed of the law. I know that the vast majority of us want to and will comply with the laws if we just know what they are. I don't believe this is any different. Thank you once again for your time and for helping us to better serve you.