

Seat belts save lives



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

During the last few years, I have read article after article in various publications making note of the number of Americans who die in vehicle accidents simply because they did not have their seat belts on.

My father was an aerospace engineer and was very much into safety. In the early 1960s, he had read about this new device that was being developed for use in cars, called the seat belt. We had no clue what he was talking about and no one in the neighborhood had heard of this either. He took my brother and me to the auto parts store with him to buy a set to install in his 1960 Dodge Seneca (Google that old car).

install them. As time went on, laws were passed requiring their installation as a mandatory safety device for our cars. By January 1964, 23 states had laws in effect requiring seat belts. But who would wear them?

For years, it was viewed as uncool to wear those seat belts; however, Dad made it mandatory that we buckle up before the car moved. On Jan. 1, 1966, while driving home from a day trip to play in the snow, we were involved in a head-on collision with a drunk driver in a pickup truck. We all survived the accident because we were wearing our seat belts.

Since the 1960s, the next step became making the use of seat belts mandatory. More than 50 years after the arrival of seat belts, we still struggle to get everyone to buckle up. Why is it resisted? What behavior are we teaching our children?

In my home, my wife and I have always used the same method my father did. The car does not move until we are all buckled in. Do it for yourself. Don't let management rush you into sacrificing safety. Do it for your family. Set the example you want your kids to follow to live long and prosper.

On a closing note, today we were informed of the passing of Tom Gates of Eugene, OR Branch 916. Tom was a member of the NALC-USPS National Safety Task Force. One of the last e-mails I received from him was on the subject of seat belt use. Our task force was struggling over how we get everyone to buy in to using seat belts whenever the vehicle is in motion. Tom located the chart below from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) website. The graph shows the result of the National Occupant Protection Use Survey, which is conducted annually by the National Center for Statistics and Analysis of the NHTSA.

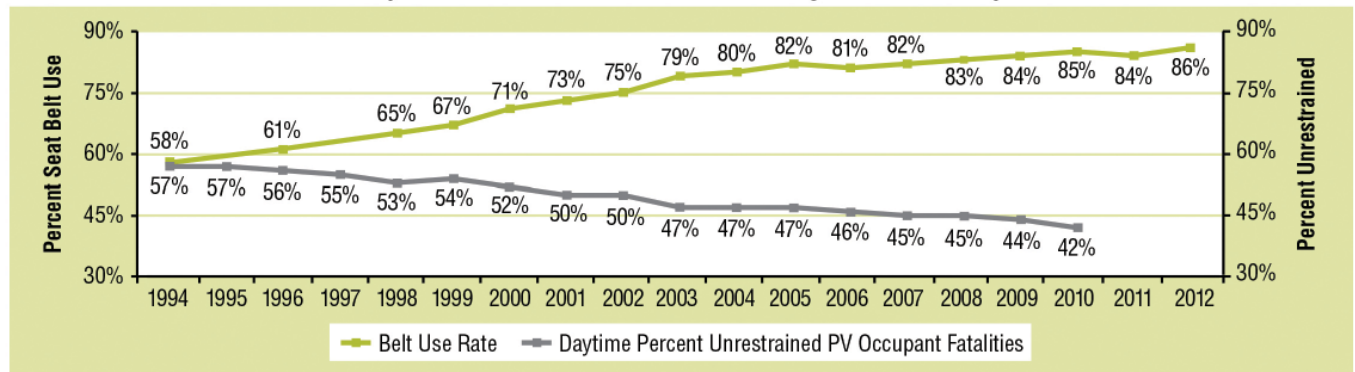
Brother Gates, we will miss you and all of your contributions on behalf of your brothers and sisters in the letter carrier craft. Rest well.

“Do it for yourself. Do it for your family. Set the example you want your kids to follow to live long and prosper.”

When we got home, he drilled holes in the floor and anchored the hardware with bolts on the underside of the car. Some of the kids in the neighborhood came over to watch and ask what he was doing. Some of the parents heard and became curious. It was a novelty.

In that era, rules were just being developed on the matter of seat belts and, as a result of publicity, American-made cars began showing up with seat belt anchors in 1962. Note: I said anchors. You still had to buy your seatbelts and

NOPUS Seat Belt Use Rate and Daytime Percent of Unrestrained Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities



(Source: NOPUS and FARS)