

# SAFETY ON THE ROAD

## Seat Belt Practices Among African Americans

(NAPSA)—In the African-American community, seat belt use remains lower than in the population as a whole, and this disparity results in greater numbers of blacks—especially children and young adults—being injured and killed in traffic crashes each year. Educating the African-American community about the lifesaving benefits of seat belts and child safety seats is the first step in creating new, healthy traffic safety behaviors.

- In 2000, seat belt use among African Americans was five percentage points lower than that for whites.

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among African Americans under age 15, and the second leading cause of death among African Americans ages 15 to 24. Increasing seat belt and child safety seat use will help to reduce this trend.

- Although black and Hispanic male teenagers travel fewer miles than their white counterparts, they are twice as likely to die in a motor vehicle crash.

- A recent survey showed that 42 percent of minority children (of which African Americans were a part) were at greater risk of air bag-related injuries because they were more frequently placed in the front seat of vehicles with passenger-side air bags. By contrast, 15 percent of white children were improperly placed in the front seat of these vehicles.

- More than 31 percent of black high school students report “rarely” or “never” wearing their seat belts.

- Observation research conducted in 2000 showed that if a driver is wearing a seat belt, young children are also restrained 97 percent of the time; however, if a driver is not wearing a seat belt, young children are restrained only 86 percent of the time.

- A 1999 study by Meharry Medical College, a historically



**Experts believe education is key to changing people's seat belt habits.**

black medical institution, reported that 100 percent seat belt use by African Americans could save 1,300 lives and prevent 26,000 injuries each year.

- The cost of unbelted drivers and passengers goes far beyond those killed and the loss to their families. We all pay—in higher taxes and higher healthcare and insurance costs. On average, inpatient hospital care costs for unbuckled crash victims are \$5,000 more than costs for buckled crash victims. The general public bears 85 percent of those costs.

Many organizations representing African Americans have partnered with the Department of Transportation (NHTSA) to help increase seat belt and child safety seat use among African Americans. These organizations include: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; Congress of National Black Churches; Edward Davis Education Foundation; Jack and Jill of America; Meharry Medical College; National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education; National Black Alcoholism and Addictions Council, Inc.; National Black Caucus of State Legislators; National Conference of Black Mayors; National Council of Negro Women; National Dental Association; National Medical Association; National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority.