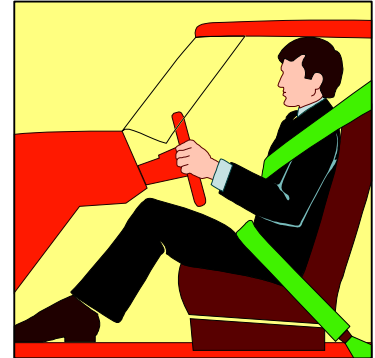


Safety Belt Use

Chapter 3

Maine has made great progress in the area of safety-belt usage over the past eight years. In 2002, safety-belt usage in Maine was the third lowest in the United States, with only 59% of Mainers buckling up compared to 79% of Americans. In 2009, this percentage improved to nearly 83%, almost on par with the national average of 84%.



Statewide

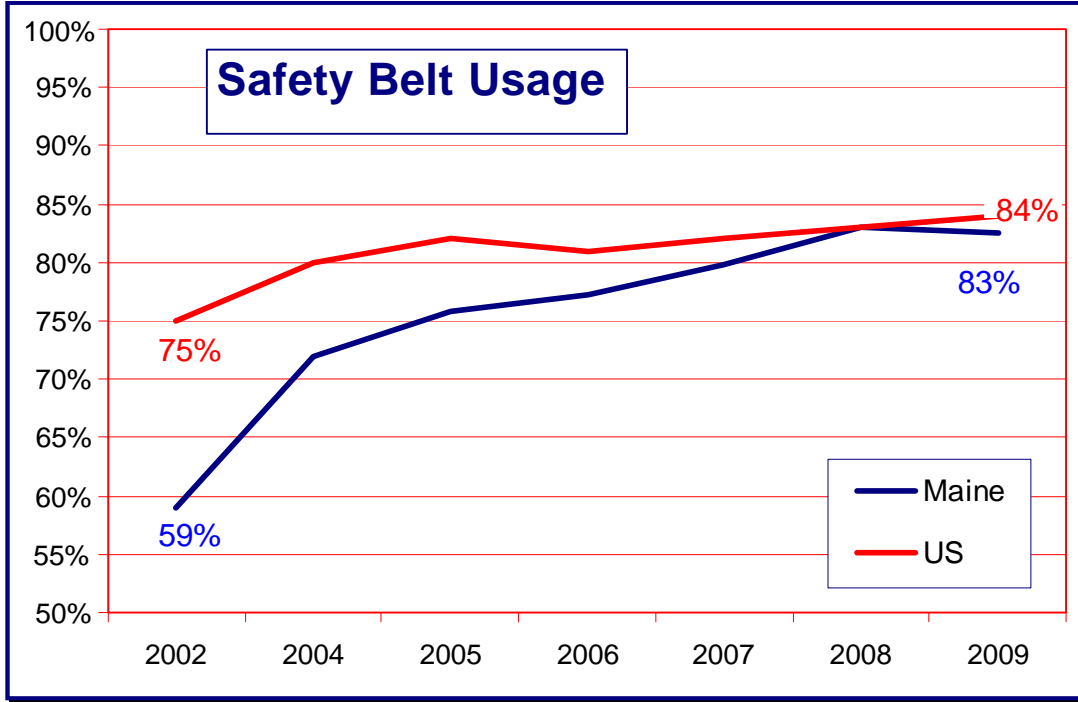
Safety-belt usage data is gathered using two methodologies:

1. **Police Crash Reports.** These reports are not considered reliable because some unbelted occupants might indicate “yes” when asked by the police if they were wearing a safety-belt prior to the crash. Police Reports involving fatalities are more reliable. Data from the FARS (Fatal Analysis Reporting System), which is comprised of Maine data from police fatal crash reports, places safety-belt usage at approximately 60%. Because unbelted occupants have a significantly higher chance of being killed in a crash, this number is not a good estimate for overall safety-belt usage.
2. **Observational Surveys.** The Maine Bureau of Highway Safety conducts periodic observational surveys of safety-belt usage among vehicle occupants in Maine. In 1997 and 2002 this survey showed safety-belt usage to be 59%. In 2009 this survey showed usage to have increased to nearly 83%. This type of study is the best estimate of overall safety belt usage.

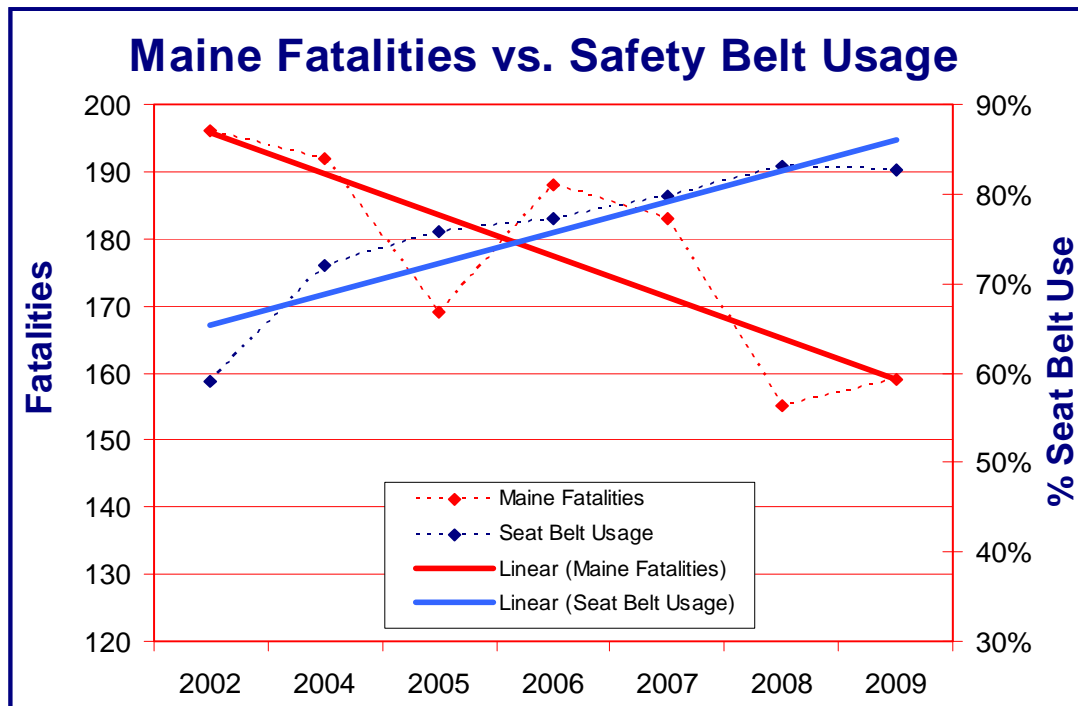
In 2007 Maine law changed failure to use safety belts from a secondary offense to a primary offense. This means that a law-enforcement officer may stop a motor vehicle if the driver or any occupant is observed not wearing a safety-belt, without the need for another traffic violation to have occurred.

Comparison with National Trends

- The national average of seat belt usage is 84%.
- States that have primary seat belt laws have an average usage rate of 88%.
- States that have secondary laws have an average usage rate of 77%.
- Pickup trucks have the lowest seat belt usage rates among passenger vehicle types at 74%.
- Occupants of sport utility vehicles have the highest usage rate at 86%.
- Research finds that lap/shoulder seat belts, when properly used, reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger car occupants by 45% and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50%.
- In 2008 alone, seat belts saved an estimated 13,250 lives (Traffic Safety Facts: 2008 Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 811153)



Maine's safety belt usage rate has steadily increased since 2002. Maine's current usage rate is now just below the national average.



As Maine's safety belt usage has increased, crash fatalities have decreased. Increased use of safety belts is one important factor in the state's improving fatality rate.