

# Chapter 4



## Seat Belt Use

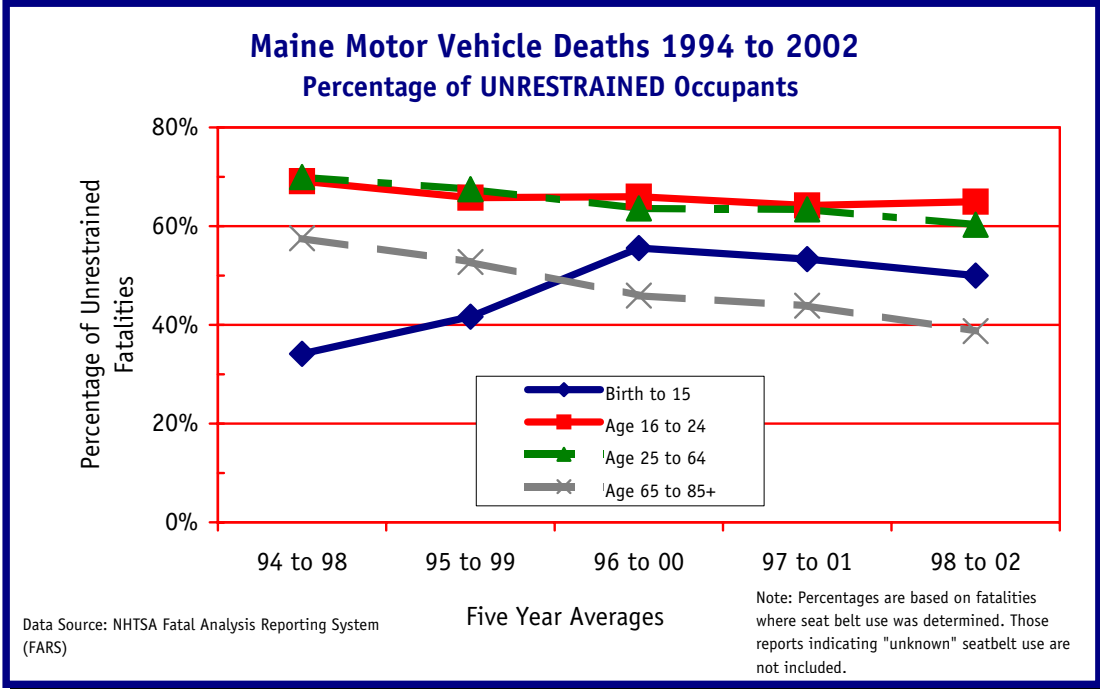
Maine's seat belt usage is the third lowest in the nation. The rate of 59% is relatively unchanged since 1998, while the national seat belt usage rate has gone up to 79%. A 2003 study done by the Preusser Research Group estimated that 12,000 lives would have been saved if all states had a primary seat belt law during 1995 to 2002.

### Statewide

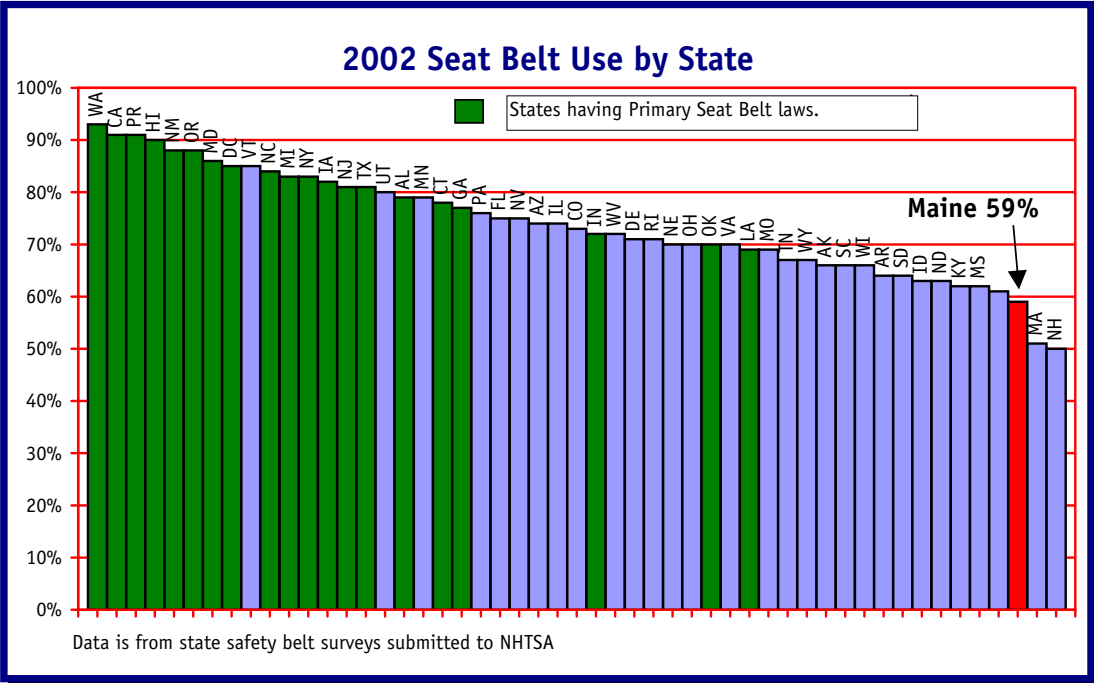
- There are two ways to capture seat belt use data:
  - 1.) Record seat belt use from police crash reports. These reports are not considered reliable because some people would indicate "yes" when asked by police if they were wearing a seat belt prior to the crash. Police crash reports involving fatalities are somewhat more reliable. As the charts indicate, usage rate is about 60%. This comes from the FARS (Fatal Analysis Reporting System), which is Maine data from police fatal crash reports.
  - 2.) Capture seat belt use data through observational surveys. The Bureau of Highway Safety conducted a survey in 2002. The results of the study reveal a 59% usage rate. The Bureau of Highway Safety did another study in 1997, which also revealed a 59% usage rate. The study revealed pickup truck drivers had the lowest usage rates of 39.7% compared to 62% of sedan operators.
- Maine has a secondary Seat Belt Law that requires all occupants to use passenger restraints. The secondary law requires law enforcement to issue a summons to drivers (over 18 years of age) for seatbelt violations only when the traffic stop is initiated for other reasons. Drivers under 18 years old can be stopped and summonsed for seat belt violations only.

### Comparison with National Trends

- The national average of seat belt usage is 79%. States that have primary seat belt laws have an average usage rate of 83%. States that have secondary laws have an average usage rate of 75%. Pickup trucks have the lowest seat belt usage rates among passenger vehicle types at 69%. Occupants of sport utility vehicles have the highest usage rate 83%. From 1975 to 2002 NHTSA estimated 147,246 lives were saved by seat belts.



Children and older vehicle occupants are more likely to use seat belts, based on fatal crash reports.



Maine has the third lowest seat belt use rate in the nation, with 59% of the adults using their seat belts.