



CRASH STORIES

To help highlight the importance of safety belt use, place any of the following crash stories in your newsletters, magazines and other publications. Included below are the following stories:

- Seatbelts Are the Safe Choice
- The Reality Of A Car Crash
- A New Ball Game
- Sixteen and Strapped In
- Remembering Cody

SEATBELTS ARE THE SAFE CHOICE

Thomasville, Georgia - It's the end of the school day, and students practically run out of the doors of Thomas County Central High School. They run so fast that when they get to their cars, they sometimes forget to buckle up.

Dexter Jones says, "Half of the time, I'm in a rush, and I just get in the car. Sometimes I just forget."

But forgetting or choosing not to buckle up has resulted in about 15 deaths this year. More than half of those deaths were teenagers.

Mike Press knows he could have been one of those statistics. He was in a wreck in April 2004. Press says, "The safety belt probably saved my life. Without it I probably would have been ejected from the vehicle."

But he wasn't, and although he has some bruises, he's glad to be alive. He credits his parents with that. "My parents never let me go anywhere without having my safety belt on," he says.

And Mike says other teens should make sure to buckle up also. He says, "You never know what's going to happen, there's always something that could go wrong."

So before he leaves, he sends out a safety warning, "Put the safety belt on!" A warning he hopes will save lives.



CLICK IT OR TICKET/OPERATION ABC (America Buckles Up Children)
May 2004 Mobilization



THE REALITY OF A CAR CRASH

The true value of a decision to buckle up is measured by each life saved by a safety belt. All too often we see pictures of victims and hear stories of crashes in which lives would have been saved if only the passengers had been wearing their belts. Some stories, like that of Crystal Underwood, are quite different. Because she chose to buckle up.

Before driving down Georgia Highway 441, she put on her belt as always – not knowing how valuable that decision would later become. While traveling south, Crystal lost control of the car and it ran off the road. During the crash, the car flipped and rolled, causing all of the windows in the car to shatter. Everything that was piled in passenger and backseats was scattered in the yard where the car finally stopped. Crystal was all that was left inside the car.

“Thankfully, I wasn’t injured in the wreck and no one else was in the car,” says Crystal. “I know that the sequence of events could have ended very differently that night; every night, parents much like mine have to face news of the injury or even death of their child because their child wasn’t wearing his or her belt.”

Too many drivers take a huge risk each time they get in the car and don’t buckle up. It doesn’t cost any money to put on a safety belt. “It’s amazing to think that if a group of highly recognized doctors were to announce they’d developed a pill that could save your life as easily as a safety belt can, people would line up to pay any amount for that magical pill,” Crystal says. “But how many times do we get in the car with friends and forget to buckle up?”

As a member of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Crystal works to provide an educated voice regarding health and safety. “Be sure to buckle up” is an important reminder for all of us.

— Visit SADD at www.saddonline.com



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A NEW BALL GAME

Tammy Wilber was the co-captain of the soccer team. The summer before her senior year of high school, she and three teammates were heading for soccer camp, cruising down a New Hampshire highway at 80 miles an hour on a sunny day. A bee started buzzing around inside the car, and a girl who was allergic to bee stings started screaming. Tammy was startled, drove off the road and then jerked the wheel to get the car back on the road. She lost control of the car. It flipped three times in the median.

No one was wearing a safety belt.

Tammy was ejected from the car. Her spinal cord was severed. At 17, she was paralyzed. “I’m in a wheelchair now because I didn’t wear a safety belt,” Tammy says.

The physical challenges Tammy faced were obvious: “I had to learn how to do everything from a wheelchair: taking a shower, getting dressed, doing the dishes. The recovery process was long and difficult.”

Less obvious were the emotional challenges. “Imagine being 17 and having your future ripped out from under you,” she says. “It was difficult being so young and realizing that I wouldn’t play soccer anymore, that I had to give up my goal of becoming a nurse. I had to change my perspective of my future.”

Now Tammy shares her story with students, telling them to buckle up every time they are in a car. “I tell them that I was them—I was 17. You’re not invincible. This could happen to anybody,” she says. “Buckle up. Life’s too short to have to push yourself around in a wheelchair.”

Tammy Wilber can be reached at tammywheels@yahoo.com.



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SIXTEEN AND STRAPPED IN

Sixteen was hardly sweet for actress and singer Cee Cee Michaela, who played Yvonne on the UPN series “Girlfriends.” At 16, while driving to school, she fell asleep at the wheel of her car. Miraculously, the car stopped right before going over an embankment. That same year, her car went out of control and slammed into a telephone pole, splitting the car in two. As ambulance workers approached, she crawled out of a car window without a scratch.

Both times, she was wearing a safety belt.

“Thank God for grace and mercy and safety belts!” she says. Now, whenever she can, she testifies about the need for safety belts, particularly in the African American community.

Cee Cee Michaela has contact information on her web site: www.ceeceemichaela.com.



REMEMBERING CODY

Cody Brown, a 16-year-old student at Tate High School in Pensacola, Fla., was riding home from school with some classmates when the driver lost control and crashed into the woods. Two students who were belted in were only slightly injured. But Cody, who wasn't wearing a safety belt, was thrown from the car. He suffered severe head and spinal injuries, went into a coma and was placed on life support.

Two nights later, Cody's family was told that he wouldn't recover. The next morning, Cody was taken off the respirator. Cody's father, Charles Brown, made a plea to Cody's friends: Wear your safety belts for the next three weeks, he urged, saying that if they could do it for that long, it would become automatic.

Cody's friends decided to turn their grief into a mission. They organized a safety belt awareness campaign for the school called Buckle Up for Cody Week. The campaign included rallies, T-shirt and bumper sticker giveaways and daily news coverage and public service announcements on the school's television and radio stations. Students dressed as crash-test dummies and joined sheriff's deputies at school parking lot checkpoints to issue mock citations to student drivers and passengers who weren't wearing safety belts.

And they issued Cody's father's challenge to the entire student body, asking Tate students to sign pledges that they would wear their safety belt for three weeks.

The Buckle Up for Cody campaign also inspired several other area schools to organize their own safety belt campaigns.

“The campaign will continue to have an effect,” said Candice Gibson, a teacher at Tate.

“Every time someone wears a Buckle Up for Cody T-shirt, you can’t help but stop and think about it.”