

Why Are You Not Wearing Your Seat Belt?

03/11/11 176 W - + 7 - 6

Go ahead, give it your best shot. Why are you not wearing your seat belt while riding on the engine? Go ahead, please explain. There must be a good reason, right? Or is 100-percent compliance the norm in these parts, or wherever you are reading?

Where did this come from? Couple items browsed in recent days. First is [Dave Statter's report about the San Antonio Fire Chief's suspension](#) of two firefighters and their Captain following a November rollover, based on the speed of their rig and that seat belts were not being used.

But should suspension be the foremost reason for buckling up? How about safety, pure and simple? Get the message at this newly redesigned [International Fire Responder Seatbelt Pledge](#) site, from Everyone Goes Home and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. And watch the quick clip on same, titled "We've heard all of the excuses..."

Discuss as desired. Be honest in your response. Maybe we'll be change some behaviors and someday save some lives.

Unfortunately it seems that the only way to achieve compliance with many policies nowadays is to implement punitive measures. Suspension is debatable in this case, but this is a safety issue where compliance is required. Rules are not just rules anymore in modern society where the "why" generation and the entitlement disposition prevail. To some it seems rules are just guidelines for voluntary compliance or simply measures for personnel to question "why." Asking "why" is often good because learning will occur; but then following the requirement becomes a decision of the individual. "Old school," ...well maybe, but we are speaking of safety issues here. The modern fire service is riddled issues surrounding reputation, integrity, and individual behavior.

A.C. Rich - 03/12/11 - 09:35

Comments posted to Statter site by user dc fireMAN:

There are three options here:

1. Get dressed at the fire house before responding (firemen stay safe, people die)
2. Get dressed once you arrive at the fire (firemen stay safe, people die and the fire department looks like idiots when we roll up in pants and t-shirts)
3. Do it like we've done for a hundred years and get dressed while enroute to the fire. (people get saved, firemen are slightly more at risk.... but hey, you're going to a fire so...)

When are people going to realize that being a fireman means that you are putting yourself at risk to save peoples lives. Its not a safe job and it never will be.

Your thoughts?

Legeros - 03/12/11 - 09:42

My reaction to that user comment, and the issue itself, is one of science. Seems like you could at least augment the issue with research and data. Determine the average time required to don PPE prior to boarding apparatus. Compare with average time saved by donning PPE while riding apparatus. Evaluate structure fires with rescued or deceased victims. Find subset of those incidents where seconds mattered. Determine how many lives would be saved by increasing the response time using the "dress while riding method." Then determine number of apparatus accidents, and those with responder deaths, and those wear seatbelts would have saved lives. Determine the rates or frequencies for both sides. Presumably you'd reach an equation of comparison that gave something closer to apples to apples. Doing this activity before boarding apparatus on average has both consequence A (reduction of responder deaths in X percentage of times that seat belts would have saved lives in accidents) and consequence B (increase— presumption here— of victim deaths in Y percentage of times that seconds would have made a difference.) Or is that too coldly clinical of an analysis? Plus, there's the issue of the final determination and analysis. Risking to save. What risk

is worth what save?

Legeros - 03/12/11 - 09:52

Risk management is always a loaded gun and perspective/value are at the center of the discussion. What is one willing to risk (individually or organizationally)? Do we risk injury, disciplinary action, response time, etc? One incident has occurred and initiated the response system; let's not cause another. Overall, it may be viewed as hard to define, but I know that PPE can be donned in less than 30 seconds prior to entering the cab and SCBA straps may be easily donned while belted and responding. The PPE is actually donned more accurately when standing and not hunched over in a cab while riding along. Duh!!!! It's fundamental, but folks must practice to learn the "new behavior." Another key is to get up off your butt when the tones activate, know where you're going, and drive accordingly. On aside, it's interesting... we preach seat belts, but they are a secondary means of safety AFTER the event occurs. We must FIRST drive accordingly. You see, philosophically there is truly no such animal as a traffic accident; only negligence on either our part or another driver.

A.C. Rich - 03/12/11 - 11:09

A.C. has some very good points. Also if the captain and firefighters would go straight to the apparatus when the bell goes off and dress, by the time the driver gets the rip and run and checks route (hopefully not needed but by the time a driver is proficient in 1st and 2nd in territories they get transferred, whoops thats another topic) goes to apparatus and starts it the crew should be dressed and in their seats or they need to start practicing putting their turnout gear on in a timely manner. Obviously there will be some exceptions such as the vehicle is already on the road or the company is out doing preplans etc. and I personally am torn between getting ready while riding or safety, but since the way our DOI's are written you will be punished for not wearing seatbelts. We are still averaging about 100 firefighter deaths a year out over 1 million firefighters in the U.S.. Avg. 25 deaths in vehicle accidents out of hundreds of thousands of calls a year. Obviously we should use some common sense but in the name of safety common sense gets dictated to you by the people in charge. This is a dangerous job and most of us knew this going into it or we wouldn't go into burning buildings at all or work on patients with a variety of diseases out there. There is Risk involved, is the risk worth taking but slowly and surely it is being dictated on what risks you can and cannot take. Every 30 seconds a fire doubles in intensity so anytime you can save 30 seconds it does make a difference. Obviously across the country the fire service has a better record on driving than the citizens we serve. .2 percent of the population dies each year in accidents. .000025 percent of firefighters die each yr in accidents and a percentage of that is coming back from calls. Now not having seatbelts on while not responding to a call or returning from a call is NEGLIGENT. The other will continue to be debated.

gen3fire - 03/12/11 - 14:01

I think y'all are over-analyzing this topic. Getting dressed while enroute can still be done while belted. The problem is 2 things need to take place before this can happen. First, we need to break the habit of getting dressed while not belted. Second, we need to practice getting dressed while belted. I don't think this is any different than putting on a mask with gloved hands. It can be done but we must practice to be proficient. Maybe this would be a good afternoon class? Just get the crew together, don bunker pants, hop in the cab, strap on the seat belt, and get dressed. The one who gets dressed the fastest doesn't have to cook or do dishes that night.

RescueRanger - 03/12/11 - 16:58

I guess what it boils down to is that i want the choice of what I am willing to risk and what im not when it comes to my personal safety. Let's be honest the whole push for seatbelts is more about MONEY and the departments, Municipalities and governments bottom line and what they may have to pay out for injuries than our personal safety, PERIOD. If i want to take my belt off for a short time to put my bunker pants on while responding to a "structure fire" call because i feel that it is worth the risk then I would like to have the choice. But under the disguise of personal safety, our risk assessments, judgement and choices are being made for us by money and administrations. I am a seat belt advocate, yes they save lives and think its crazy not to have one on, but there are always rare exceptions. I believe suspending the firefighters for not wearing the seatbelts was wrong. The driver should be the only one punished for the way he was driving he was in control of the vehicle. And possibly the Captain if he let his driver drive like a bat out of hell on the roads like that. In that situation you put citizens more at risk, if they had hit a car because of this type of driving behavior they would have killed someone whether the firefighters had seat belts on or not. I would not want THAT on me. Anyway, Like a certain old chief use to say "wules is wules" so the choice has been taken out of my hands cause i prefer not to be made an example of when someones gets caught without a seatbelt on.

gen3fire - 03/12/11 - 18:57

So are seat belts comparative small potatoes in the range of risks experienced by the modern firefighter? If yes, why are national leaders and their campaigns trying to get more firefighters belted?

Legeros - 03/12/11 - 19:44

Slightly off subject but good article. http://www.vafire.com/government_affairs..

gen3fire - 03/12/11 - 21:06

I have felt the same way as gen3fire in regards to "If i want to take my belt off for a short time to put my bunker pants on while responding to a "structure fire" call because i feel that it is worth the risk then I would like to have the choice". The one thing that keeps me from doing this is the risk that my family will not or may not receive benefits from my death or injury.

Rob Mitchell - 03/13/11 - 10:23

Capt. Mitchell, i believe your family gets an extra 10-20,000\$ if you get killed with your seatbelt on. Benefits aren't denied if you don't have it on...yet, but that is probably a possibility in the future. I was taught not to put all my faith in the govt and believe they will take care of me or my family, of course I would like to believe they will but I made sure to cover myself and family with enough insurance that if something happens and benefits are denied that my family will have more than enough to take care of themselves financially. Like most everyone else i didn't take this job to get rich but they do pay me to make quick decisions to the best of my ability so why not work harder to do more risk assessment education instead of trying to limit the choices i can make.

gen3fire - 03/13/11 - 15:00

After hearing some these silly and unprofessional comments,I truly believe that stupidity is self correcting.

The Badger - 03/13/11 - 15:08

Lol. A comment about stupidity coming from someone who "hears" what people write.

just saying - 03/13/11 - 20:14

The Legeros blog. Challenging English speakers AND listeners for nearly five years now...

Legeros - 03/13/11 - 20:31

I agree with most of the comments so far, seatbelts are a good thing. I got used to wearing mine so long ago that I don't even realize that i'm wearing it now.

I will also add to what KC mentioned earlier, driver training. The only "driver training" we get is in first class school and that's it. It used to be not such a big deal, most folks 10-15 years ago had at least some experience driving a "bigger" truck, either on the farm or on the volunteer dept., and the apparatus we were driving back then were no where near as fast as what we are operating today. The majority today have not driven anything bigger than the car they drive around in every day. Some understand that the 37,000lb. apparatus (on up to the 70,000lb. ladders)they're driving handles much different and some don't. I'm not blaming them, they have not had some of the opportunities to operate bigger vehicles that some of us have. All the same, we are failing them by not having any continuing formal driver training.

I think with more formalized driver training we would see some of the accident rates drop. I recently read where the driver of one apparatus tried to take a turn at 30 mph.. Really???

firedriver - 03/13/11 - 21:00

Was in a class with the world famous Tramp Dunn a while back. We were discussing training and training topics. He brought up a good point that has stuck with me ever since. What is the one thing we do on every call? We drive. And how much training have we received or provided on driving over the years?

(sound of crickets in the distance)

Not much. Not enough.

DJ - 03/13/11 - 21:24

What a great way to sit around the coffee table @ your fire station and have this discussion? You will really began to see that there is so many different opinions about driving with a seatbelt on / off. The bottom line is if your department has an SOP / SOG about wearing it and it is a Federal Law too then you should be punished. I spec out fire trucks and today's fire apparatus is sometimes smarter than we think such as, the seats have pressure senors, seatbelt not being worn, Air Bags, Rollover Protection, Black Boxes, & many others. Today's apparatus is much heavier than older ones, Aerial / Ladder Trucks right at or over 80,000lbs. Then I heard about driver training programs, they are great but we with no money in the training budget it goes by the waist side. We are promoting drivers, engineers, Lt's, Chauffeurs with little or no experience and then it is up to there Officers to get them the training they need so that they do not scare the people that ride the apparatus or the citizens that we respond to. One the biggest problem right here in North Carolina is our Johnston County youth not wearing seatbelts. Johnston County death by motor vehicle in teenagers under the age of 18 is the highest in our state 4 years RUNNING.... We need to lead by example not be the example. Please "Wear YOUR SEATBELTS ALWAYS WHEN OPERATING ANY VEHICLE". Thank You and be Fire Safe

JKJ (Email) - 03/13/11 - 22:13

@just saying. I bet you got beatings for playing with your sister dolls when you were a kid.

Badger - 03/14/11 - 06:29

To all the John Wayne firefighters out there, who think that they are ten feet tall and bulletproof. Forrest Gump put it in simple words. And I quote "STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES"

Badger - 03/14/11 - 06:44

After reading the D.C. members comments, which are a little off center, my view is this; set your gear up when in quarters tactically. If it means hanging it on the side of the truck, leaving a door on the rig open or whatever else to speed you up, so be it. I know where he's coming from though, you see some guys taking FOREVER to get dressed before leaving the house. These are probably the same guys that hit the coffee pot and eat breakfast before setting up their gear when they arrive for their shift in the morning. Then, when they finally get around to it, their gear is thrown on the truck with no thought process in mind other than "I need this stuff". Take the extra two minutes to pull yourself away from the Diet Dew/ Honey Bun combo and relieve your guy WHEN YOU ARRIVE for your tour, setting your gear up to help your crew get out the door faster. This is why we get paid folks. You're going to be with your crew for 24 hours, the conversation can wait, do the right thing. It still amazes me when you have the buzzer hit at 7:58am, and gear is flying everywhere because the oncoming relief is flapping their gums around the kitchen table, versus relieving their guy when they came through the door. Now they're behind the eight ball...

My bunker pants, coat and radio go on in a matter of seconds. Same with the others on my crew, we set our stuff up after every run the same way. What works for Joe Smith, might not for Jane Doe, but it's why we're here. Play with what might work for you, practice, then try something else. My system is simple; bunker pants on the floor with suspender adjustments on the boot openings, coat hanging on the side of the rig, with the inside facing out, radio strap hanging on the coat. Pants up, radio on, coat over radio...it takes only a few seconds, and if it comes in as a fire it goes on even faster. Putting on my SCOTT is quick too; whichever shoulder the seatbelt is coming over, that's the SCOTT strap that goes on first. Then I belt in, and finish up putting on the SCOTT.

Yes, there are risks with this job. We accept this fact when we're sworn in. I'm all about reasonable aggressiveness, calculated risk, yada, yada, yada. Some folks are more aggressive than others when it comes to "the fight". Wearing a seat belt doesn't make you any less of a fireman if you're one of the more aggressive types, it just means you're smarter. Regardless of your aggressiveness, one thing remains the same; SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES, so wear the damn things!

Silver - 03/14/11 - 10:54

Ok all I will say is seatbelts save lives it saved mine! Great points by everyone here. Yes we risk our life to save a total stranger. However how selfish are we when we risk the survival of our families by NOT wearing a seat belt? We spent months training new ppl on how to get dressed quick and get on the rig, but a couple days on line and they learn the new way, get dressed while going down the road! There is around half a million in LODD benefit money and if your negligent and don't wear the belt the benefits WILL be denied! Also, here in NC the issue is more about why are our young volunteers not wearing their belts when they are driving their pick-ups 100 mph going to a call and returning from! Anyway, buckle up everyone you owe it to your family!

Jason Lane - 03/14/11 - 15:55

Name: (real name
preferred)
E-mail: (optional)
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

[/ Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?