

ON TRACK WITH MDT

Once again, summer is drawing to a close, and thousands of children will soon be heading back to school.

In anticipation of that, many families are taking end-of-summer vacations and planning back-to-school shopping trips – and, in the hustle of these busy days, safety concerns can sometimes take a back seat.

As you head out on your end-of-summer outings, I hope you'll share the following safety tips from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) with your loved ones. Practicing them could make the difference between life and death.

Tips for Youngsters

- Always buckle up when you're riding in a car. According to NHTSA's *Toll of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2002* report, available online at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/STSI/>, there were 270 fatalities in motor vehicle crashes in Montana in 2002, 221 of whom were occupants age five and up in passenger vehicles. Of those 221 occupants, 156, or 70.6%, were not properly restrained. For those under the age of five, the numbers are even more grim: of the three deaths of passenger vehicle occupants under the age of five in Montana in 2002, all three (or 100%) were unrestrained.
- Always ride in the back seat. It's the safest place for young people.
- Always wear a helmet and follow traffic safety rules when riding your bike.
- If you ride a school bus, learn and practice the safety rules for waiting at the bus stop, getting on and off the bus, and riding the bus, paying particular attention to the "danger zone" immediately surrounding the bus. This area extends ten feet in front of the bus, ten feet on each side of the bus and ten feet behind the bus and is where children are at greatest risk of not being seen by the bus driver.
- If you walk to school, learn and practice the safety rules for pedestrians. Always cross at cross walks and obey all traffic signs, traffic lights and crossing guard instructions.
- Be a good role model for your younger siblings and friends: help them learn and practice these safety rules.

Tips for Parents/Educators

- Buckle up every time you ride in a car.
- Help your children/students learn and practice the safety rules for walking, bicycling and riding in a passenger car, school bus and/or transit bus.
- Supervise young children as they walk or bike to school or as they wait at the school bus stop.

- Be a good role model, especially when you are with your kids/students. Always buckle up in the car, always wear a helmet when biking, and always follow pedestrian safety rules.
- Support any “Getting to School Safely” activities sponsored by your school, the PTA/PTO or other community organizations.
- If your teen has just obtained a driver license, don’t allow him/her to carry any teen or children passengers, play music or eat in the car for the first six months he/she drives; conversely, don’t let your child or teen ride with a teen driver until he or she has at least six months’ or more driving experience.

Tips for Motorists

- Buckle up every time you ride in a car.
- Slow down and obey all traffic laws and speed limits.
- Always stop for a school bus that has stopped to load or unload passengers – it’s the law. (See MCA 61-8-351.)
- Be alert and ready to stop. Watch for children walking in the street, especially where there are no sidewalks. Keep an eye out for children playing and gathering near bus stops. Look for children arriving late for the bus who could dart into the street without looking for traffic. When backing out of a driveway or leaving a garage, check for children walking or biking to school.
- When driving in neighborhoods or school zones, watch for young people who are in a hurry to get to school and might not be thinking about getting there safely.

And there’s one thing more. At the end of July, MDT had 251 active construction projects in various stages of completion, which means that some are just starting and others are approaching their end. So, as you’re out on our roads, I’d appreciate your watching for equipment and workers along the roadway. By working together, we can keep our loved ones safe and, when each day ends, that is what really matters.

As always, we look forward to staying “on track” with the needs of our customers and our great state.

Dave Galt
Director