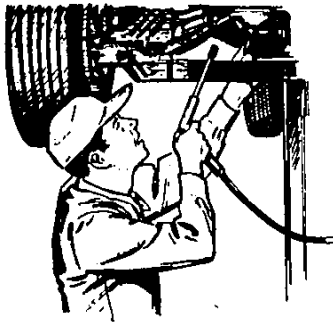


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## Why Use Seat Belts?

Seat belts are a well-known, yet tragically unused device for saving lives in automobile accidents.

They were first used in airplanes during the first World War, more than 50 years ago, to keep aircrewmembers from falling out during acrobatics or from being bounced out in rough air.

Nobody thought of them in connection with automobile safety until the 1950's, because the common belief -- which now seems silly -- was that you were better off in an accident if you were thrown out.

AN INDIANA State Police sergeant named Elmer Paul stimulated some new thinking on that in the late 1940s. He noticed that many seemingly minor crashes became fatal accidents because someone was thrown out of the car and either hit something on the outside or was crushed when the car rolled over. Sgt. Paul started a systematic study of such accidents in Indiana, and succeeded in interesting the Cornell (University) Aeronautical Laboratory -- up to that time involved in aircraft studies -- in doing a scientific analysis of accident statistics to isolate causes of fatal injury.

The results of this study provided the first conclusive evidence that ejection was the leading cause of fatal injury in auto accidents. The second leading cause of injury was impact of the occupant against the interior of the car when he kept moving after the car stopped -- what is known as the "second collision."

Ford Motor Company first became actively interested in the studies of Sgt. Paul in 1949, and began working with Cornell in 1950. As a result of the accident studies, Ford tried to find ways of keeping occupants from being thrown out of the car, and from being thrown against the interior.

The seat belt was the first proven solution.

PERHAPS because people do not like to think they will ever be involved in an accident, seat belts were hardly an overwhelming success when they were first introduced in 1955. Until they were made standard in 1964, no more than one out of five auto buyers demanded them.

Today, more than half the cars on U.S. roads are equipped with seat belts, but most people still fail to fasten them.

Surveys report that about one-third of those who have seat belts claim to wear them most of the time. Yet, police reports show that fewer than five per cent of accident victims wore seat belts.

This could be interpreted two ways:

People who wear seat belts are inherently safer drivers and less likely to be involved in an accident.

Or, people claim they wear seat belts when they actually do not.

ACCIDENT studies over several years by a University of Michigan medical team show that 40 per cent of those killed in accidents would have been saved had they been wearing seat belts.

