

Respect the Cage, Buckle Up

Montana Department of Transportation Exhibit bring important message to MontanaFair patrons

Once he sat inside the safety cage of the fatal crash vehicle, it took only a moment for Jim Lynch to realize that personal experience is a powerful tool to motivate change. As the director of the Montana Department of Transportation and the Governor's Representative for Highway Safety, Lynch's goal is to save lives through increasing seat belt use in Montana.

His message is clear: Respect the cage and buckle up. When Jim Lynch began working on a seat belt safety campaign last year, he met two families torn apart because of one life-altering decision. In July 2007, two young men left a bar together, best friends with young families and bright futures. The driver was buckled, and at first, so was the passenger. Then, on a good faith act of trusting his friend's driving, the passenger unbuckled his seat belt. Within minutes, the car left the road and rolled several times. The unbelted passenger was ejected. He died from his injuries. The belted driver was unharmed.

One bad decision changed the lives of these two young men and their families forever. If the passenger had "respected the cage" and had been wearing his seat belt, he more than likely would not have died. Though the car was crushed end-to-end, within the safety cage there was room at the head, feet and sides of the passenger seat. There was room to live. The notion of having room to live within the safety cage of a vehicle prompted MDT to develop a "Room to Live" campaign, which featured an 11-minute video of this tragic story.

The video has been seen by thousands of people around the nation since it was produced by MDT in 2008. The many responses to the video prompted the development of another powerful seat belt safety campaign, which features a traveling display intended to save lives and preserve Montana families. This life-saving exhibit includes:

- The crashed vehicle, with a "Room to Live" video playing from inside the car about the families affected by this tragedy;
- The Rollover Simulator, a compact pickup truck cab affixed to a two-axle, low profile trailer. Acceleration and braking control systems spin the cab to simulate a rollover accident and a crash-test dummy gets tossed out of the vehicle;
- "Fastest Belt in the West" buckle up contest;
- Prizes and giveaways.

Two pickup trucks, a GMC and a Ford 250, are wrapped in "Respect the Cage – Buckle Up" graphics and will be pulling the trailers carrying the crashed vehicle and the Rollover Simulator.

In the last five years, 1,063 drivers and passengers died in vehicle

crashes on Montana roads. More than 70% - that's 751 people – were not wearing their seat belts. These disturbing numbers are just one reason the Montana Department of Transportation has made a commitment to reduce the number of injuries and deaths that occur on Montana roads. That's why the "Respect the Cage – Buckle Up" exhibit is traveling around the state to show people why buckling up is so important.

"The crashed vehicle, along with the 'Room to Live' video, the Rollover Simulator and other 'Respect the Cage' elements, show the importance of seat belts and the impact one life can have on so many people," said Director Lynch. "We hope this exhibit will influence more people to buckle up."

In 2007, 217 drivers and passengers died in crashes on Montana roads. More than 73 percent of them were not wearing their seat belt. Of those 217 occupants, 105 were ejected, either partially or completely. The highest percentage of fatalities and incapacitating injuries occur in single vehicle rollovers where the person is ejected from the vehicle.

Vehicles are built with a reinforced safety cage to protect the occupants in a crash. Within that cage is your best chance to survive—because there is room to live if you stay in the vehicle properly buckled up. "Wear your seat belt," said Director Lynch. "It is the single most effective way to reduce injuries and fatalities in motor vehicle crashes. Along with NEVER getting in a vehicle with a driver who is under the influence. So please, respect the cage and buckle up...if not for your sake, buckle up for someone you love."

The majority of funds for the "Respect the Cage – Buckle Up" exhibit come from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. For more information, please visit www.respectthecage.com.

The "Respect the Cage--Buckle Up" Exhibit will be at MontanaFair all week long, August 7th-15th. Director, Jim Lynch will be available for questions and interviews on August 7th from 2pm on.

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