

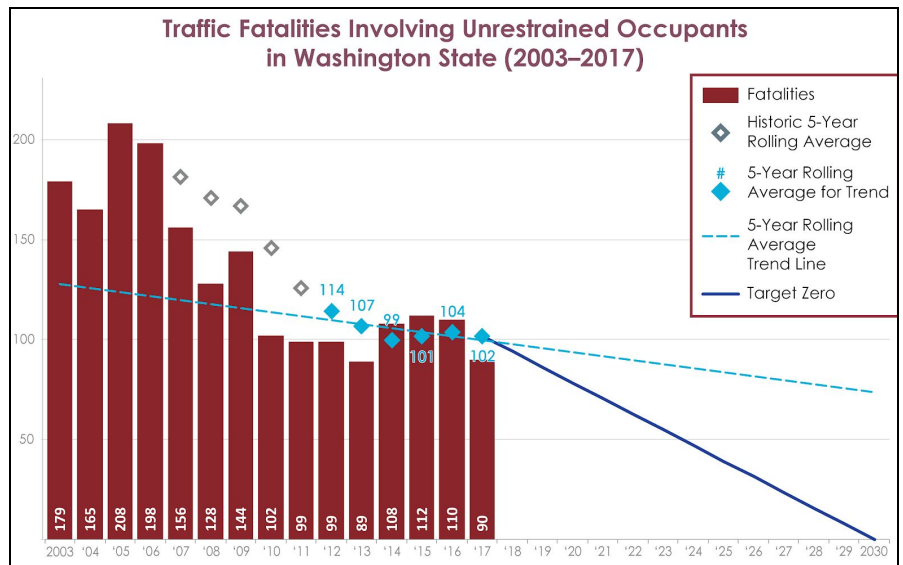


Washington State Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2019: Unrestrained Occupants
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Challenge: From 2015–2017, nearly one in five fatally injured persons were not using or properly using a seat belt or child passenger system. There has also been no change in reported serious injuries for unrestrained or improperly restrained children, an average of 10 every year since 2012.

Generally, restraining occupants of a vehicle to improve safety involves use of two categories of devices:

- Safety restraint systems (seat belts): installed in the vehicle
- Child passenger safety systems: added to increase the safety and security of children riding in vehicles (car and booster seats)



Washington’s 2018 observed seat belt use rate was 93.2 percent, one of the highest rates in the nation. Washington’s seat belt use rate has been over 90 percent since the primary seat belt law was implemented in 2002. Despite Washington’s consistently high seat belt use rate, from 2015–2017, nearly one in five fatally injured persons were not using, or not properly using, a seat belt or child passenger safety system.

In Washington State, all children under the age of 13 are required to ride in the back seat. Other requirements focus on keeping children in appropriate child passenger systems, either car seats or booster seats. The number of fatalities for unrestrained or improperly restrained children fell from seven in 2012–2014 to four in 2015–2017. That news is tempered somewhat by having no change in reported serious injuries for unrestrained or improperly restrained children, an average of 10 every year since 2012.

Strategies and Objectives for Positive Change:

Key countermeasures for unrestrained occupants include:



- Maintaining Washington
- Focusing on high-risk populations (American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AIANs), younger drivers)
- Safest Ride Campaign: a media campaign about the importance of children riding buckled up in the back seat
- Improving law enforcement understanding of car seats (law enforcement officers determine if a child restraint system is appropriate for the child's individual height, weight, and age)

What You Can Do:

- Engage and collaborate with all levels of law enforcement to effectively carry out high visibility communications, outreach, and enforcement of seat belt use, such as the Click It or Ticket campaign – see page 89
- Identify population groups with lower than average restraint use rates and implement communications, outreach, and enforcement campaigns directed at groups/ areas where restraint use is lowest, particularly rural areas
- Encourage law enforcement and other emergency responders to adopt seat belt use policies for their employees.