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News Release

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If You're Unbuckled This Thanksgiving, Expect to Pay a Fine No Warnings. No Excuses. *Click It or Ticket.*

Every year, the Thanksgiving holiday is one of the busiest travel times. Millions of Americans hit the roads to spend time with family and friends. Unfortunately, more vehicles on the road means the potential for more dangerous roads, and it's as important as ever that everyone is buckled up. To make sure the message reaches all St. Charles Parish drivers and passengers, the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office will be joining other state and local law enforcement agencies to participate in the United States Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) high-visibility seat belt enforcement campaign *Click It or Ticket*. The no-excuses, zero-tolerance crackdown combines powerful messages about seat belt safety, with increased patrols day and night, targeting all unbuckled motorists—those who still aren't getting the point.

"The statistics are really troubling," said Sheriff Champagne. "Almost half of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes are not wearing their seat belts. And during this busy time on our highways, we see way too many preventable fatalities in crashes." During the 2013 Thanksgiving holiday period (6 p.m. on Wednesday, November 27, to 5:59 a.m. on Monday, December 2), there were 301 passenger vehicle occupants killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes nationwide. Fifty-eight percent of those killed were **NOT** wearing seat belts.

These tragic crashes could have turned out differently. NHTSA research indicates that proper seat belt use reduces the risk of fatal injury to front seat passengers by 45 percent, and the risk of moderate to serious injury by 50 percent. In 2013, seat belts saved the lives of 12,584 passenger vehicle occupants. If seat belt use had been at 100 percent, an additional 2,800 people would still be alive this Thanksgiving.

"We want people to know that we're serious about this campaign, because we see the devastation first-hand when people fail to buckle up in a crash," said Sheriff Greg Champagne.

Nationwide, the seat belt use rate is at an all-time high of 87 percent, but the *Click It or Ticket* campaign aims to reach that remaining 13 percent. The ones who think they are above the law, 'good enough' drivers, or invincible in a crash. In 2013, for example, there were 9,580 unbuckled occupants killed in crashes—49 percent of all passenger vehicle occupants killed that year. At night, the numbers are even more disturbing. During the Thanksgiving holiday weekend in 2013, law enforcement noted that 64 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants killed at night were unrestrained, as compared to 48 percent during the day.

"Whether you're driving to the grocery store, a friend's house a mile away, or your grandparents' house across the country," Sheriff Champagne added, "please buckle up this Thanksgiving, and every time you're on the road." Drivers who fail to heed the warning are taking too big a risk—a hefty fine or worse: dying in a crash.

It only takes a second to buckle up, and isn't that easier than getting pulled over and ticketed? With the help of highway safety advocates and local law enforcement officers across the country, we can increase seat belt use and save lives on our roadways this Thanksgiving.