

PEARL HARBOR: NAVY REGION HAWAII PERSONNEL CLICKING IN

When the Traffic Safety Council under Program Manager Jack Nagaishi, studied seatbelt usage at Navy Region Hawaii installations, they discovered that 91 percent of motorists were wearing their seatbelts when exiting base gates. Navy Commands across the Region joined forces through information campaigns and training seminars to raise that number to 100 percent. The main goal of the campaign was to protect all personnel operating motor vehicles on the installations from the number one cause of death and disability in the military service - motor vehicle mishaps.

According to the Naval Safety Center's statistics, more service men and women die in traffic accidents than from any other cause, including combat. The most effective life-saving device in vehicles is the seatbelt. Naval Safety Center's motor vehicle

statistics show that wearing seatbelts saves nearly 10,000 lives each year. "Seatbelts save lives. Failing to take time to buckle up gains only a few seconds but may cost a lifetime," stated Navy Personnel Development Center's safety officer, Ralph Deal who spearheaded efforts to increase seatbelt use. "The goal of *Operation Seatbelt* is to convince more of our people that wearing a seatbelt may make the difference in surviving a crash."



Strategically placed signs are a reminder to use seatbelts



Navy Region Hawaii safety campaign goal is 100% seatbelt usage

Base security departments have set up electronic signs that read "Seatbelts save lives - buckle-up" at different locations around base gates to remind workers and visitors to wear their seatbelts and to drive safely on and off the base. In addition, local commands place signs supplied by the Naval Safety Center that say, "Buckle Up Now" at the most advantageous locations for observation by both staff and students departing primary

buildings. The signs are installed for a single work week at the beginning of each month to avoid becoming simply another sign. The "freshness" has a positive impact. Each command also offers defensive driving

training targeted at personnel under 26 years of age, full time vehicle operators, personnel cited for specific serious violations, and personnel involved in motor vehicle accidents. The training explains the benefits of wearing seatbelts and the laws and military regulations requiring their use. E-mail messages are also utilized extensively to further support the campaign to educate base personnel on the need to buckle up.

“Awareness is a critical factor,” related Jack Nagaishi, who manages the Navy Region Hawaii Traffic Safety Program. “Everybody is involved because we all share the roads.”

For this reason, commands are collaborating to end the senseless deaths of our nation’s young people in traffic mishaps. “We get a lot better traction when we promote seatbelt use as a team effort,” explained Deal. According to the Naval Safety Center’s statistics on traffic safety, from 2000 to 2004, nearly two-thirds of the Sailors who died in crashes in privately owned vehicles were less than 25 years of age.



Naval Safety Center statistics indicate 2/3 of Sailors who died in crashes were under 25 years of age.

Nagaishi expressed the opinion that those who join the military are trained to overcome obstacles in order to win in battle. Both Nagaishi and Deal cited an *invincibility syndrome* among young Sailors and Marines as a contributing factor to high risk driving behavior. Nagaishi believes that their energy and



confidence sometimes flow inappropriately into their private lives, so that driving may seem like another obstacle to overcome. The *Operation Seatbelt* challenge is to re-channel young warriors’ energy and courage into driving defensively and using their seatbelts as the life-saving tools that they are.

Bottom line - seat belts save lives

Accountability ultimately comes down to each individual Sailor and Marine. The Naval Safety Center’s figures show that failure to buckle one’s seatbelt contributes to more traffic fatalities within our military organization than any other unsafe driving behavior. Every hour an American dies in a traffic mishap

because he or she failed to buckle up. “We are each responsible for our own behavior,” Deal repeated. “It’s easy to forget to wear a seatbelt if you don’t use it every time you get into a vehicle. Each time you fail to buckle up, it could cost your life and every time you wear your seatbelt, it could end up saving your life.”

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