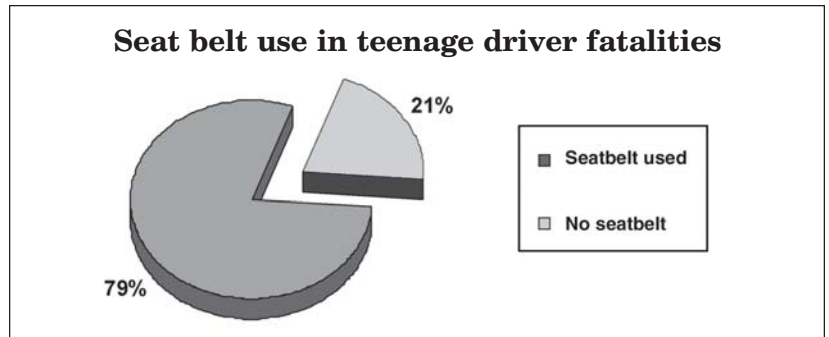

NTDB™ data points

Click click—you're dead?

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS, Chicago, IL, and John Fildes, MD, FACS, Las Vegas, NV

We are tired of hearing the anecdotal story about a driver in a motor vehicle crash whose life was spared because they were not wearing their seat belt. The force of the impact caused them to be thrown from the vehicle, thus escaping major injuries. In that one individual's mind, if they had been restrained with a seat belt they surely would have died. If they would have listened to the "click it or ticket" campaign, it would have been "click click—you're dead."

Unfortunately, some motorists, especially younger ones, listen to these urban legends and tall tales. They look for any reason to rationalize their risk-taking behavior. This age group of teenage drivers has a higher crash risk than any other age group, as measured by miles driven or by population. The last thing they need is an excuse to dispense with a proven safety device that is known to mitigate the severity of the injuries in the event of a motor vehicle crash. In fact, seat belt use among teenagers is lower than among older drivers, as reported in the National Safety Council's 2002 white paper on teenage seat belt use. The report found seat belt use to be 36 percent among fatally injured teenage drivers. This report also mentions that states with a primary seat belt law have a higher incidence of seat belt use.



The records in the National Trauma Data Bank™ *Annual Report 2004* contain close to 200,000 records of motor vehicle-related injuries. The overall incidence of seat belt use in these injured motorists is a rousing 42 percent. When focusing on teenage seat belt use, the percentage drops to 31 percent, and of those teenage drivers who are fatally injured, only one in five used a seat belt. These data are depicted in the graph on this page.

Over the past several years, there has been a steady increase in overall seat belt use among motorists. According to federal highway safety officials, in 2004 seat belt use increased in 37 states and the national seat belt use rate was at an all time high of 80 percent. States with a primary seat belt law are seeing a steady increase in seat belt use. Since the records in the NTDB 2004 report come from a five-

year sliding window (see last month's *Bulletin* article, page 52), one can only hope that the yearly increase in motorist seat belt use will translate to an increased use among teenagers. It is up to all of us as responsible adults and parents to take every opportunity to instruct teenage drivers in the proper use of safety restraints. Teenage driving behavior starts with observing their parents and instructors, so please do not forget that click click—you're alive!

Throughout the year, we will be highlighting these data through brief monthly reports in the *Bulletin*. The full *National Trauma Data Bank Annual Report Version 4.0* is available on the ACS Web site as a PDF file and a PowerPoint® presentation at <http://www.ntdb.org>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.