

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Airbags

Airbags are a great life saving device but only if they are used properly. There's been a lot of misinformation about airbags and, in many cases, that misinformation has had tragic results. Let's clear up some of that misinformation and discuss the proper use of airbags.

First, we need to understand that airbags don't work by themselves. For airbags to work properly, the vehicle occupants must wear their seat belts and sit at a proper distance behind the airbag. Some people operate under the assumption that they don't need to wear seatbelts because their vehicle is equipped with airbags. This is one of the deadliest mistakes a driver can make.

In a crash, the vehicle comes to a rapid and violent halt but the vehicle occupants will continue traveling at whatever speed the vehicle was traveling just before the crash (Newton's first law of motion says an object in motion will remain in motion until acted upon by an opposing force.) If they are wearing seat belts, they will be held in place but if they aren't, they'll continue in motion until they hit the steering wheel or the dashboard.

When activated, airbags deploy in one-tenth of a second and open at 200 mph. Imagine the crash forces of an adult body traveling forward at, say 45 mph, when it comes into contact with the airbag traveling in the opposite direction at 200 mph. The forces in a crash like that are enough to easily kill someone.



Most of the people killed by airbags weren't wearing their seatbelts. If you're wearing a seatbelt, your body will be held in place, giving the airbag time to fully deploy creating a cushion for your head and chest.

Other drivers who have been killed by airbags were sitting too close to the airbags. These were generally smaller drivers 5'4" and shorter and were sitting so closely that the airbag punched them in the face as it deployed.

To be properly positioned, drivers need to put the seat back as far as they can while still being able to safely reach and operate the pedals. To measure whether you are a safe distance from the center of the wheel, stretch your arm straight out and adjust your seat until your wrist rests on top of the steering wheel. That should be a good, safe distance from the airbag.

Babies in rear-facing car seats and small children should never ride in the front seat of a car. They should always ride in a federally approved car seat in the back seat.

Remember that airbags don't always deploy in every crash. They are only activated when one or both sensors on the front bumper are struck in a crash. If your car is hit at an angle or from the rear end, the sensors won't be hit and the airbags won't activate.

Passengers should never ride with their feet resting on the dashboard. There have been crashes where a passenger's knees were driven into their face at 200 mph by the force of the deploying airbag.



