

# New Menominee Tribal Law Boosts Occupant Restraint Use

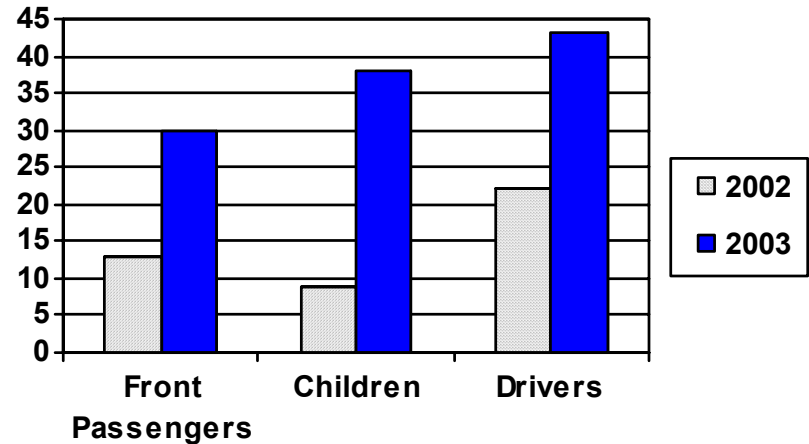
Motor vehicle crashes (MVC's) are the leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) 1-44 years of age. Between 1999-2000, the MVC death rate for Wisconsin AI/AN was over twice the Wisconsin All Races rate. Occupant restraint devices such as seat belts and child safety seats are proven to reduce motor vehicle crash (MVC) – related injuries and death. Yet surveys show that car seat usage rates are very low in many AI/AN communities. This was certainly true of the Menominee Reservation in Spring 2002, when observational surveys showed a 22 % seat belt usage rate for drivers and a 9 % child safety seat use.



*Officer Joseph Holl with the Bemidji Area Indian Health Service "Injury Prevention Partner of the Year 2002" award*

Passage and enforcement of occupant restraint laws is vital for increasing occupant restraint use. Officer Joseph Holl, Safe Communities Officer, Menominee Tribal Police, is a strong advocate for occupant protection. In August 2002, his tireless efforts were rewarded when the Menominee Tribal Legislature passed a primary seat belt and child safety seat law—a law that is more stringent than Wisconsin State law! Soon after the law passed, the Tribal Police began issuing warnings, then progressed to citations with fines.

Observational surveys of over 700 Tribal-registered vehicles conducted summer 2003 showed that driver's seat belt use rates had doubled to 43 % and child safety seat use had more than quadrupled to 38 % !



Although these figures are preliminary, covering only one year, indications are that a primary occupant restraint law does increase seat belt and child car seat use. Continued observations over several years are needed to determine if the law will continue to affect usage rates.

*Special thanks to Gary Schuettpelz, Menominee Environmental Services Director, and Officer Joseph Holl, Menominee Tribal Police Department for contributing this information, and to the Memoninee Nation News for the photograph.*