

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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U.S. ARMY EUROPE OFFICIALS SAY SEAT BELT USE SAVING LIVES – AND LICENSES

By Spc. Shane Eschenburg
U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Seat belts save an estimated 13,000 lives in the U.S. each year, and approximately 7,000 car accident deaths could have been avoided if passenger's seatbelts were fastened, according to the U.S. National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration.

While some drivers feel wearing seat belts can contribute to serious injury or death during a mishap, safety experts say buckling up dramatically increases a person's chance to survive an accident.

For both U.S. Army Europe and German drivers, a seat belt violation is when a motor vehicle is in operation and the seat belt is unbuckled by the driver or any passengers, regardless of whether the vehicle is in motion.

In Fiscal Year 06, 457 people were cited for seat belt violations on installations in the USAREUR footprint. With only two months remaining in FY 07, 231 people have been ticketed.

"It appears that the common-sense thing to do is buckle up and protect passengers and drivers, save lives and reduce serious injuries," said Tom Lorenzini, registrar with United States Army Europe Registry of Motor Vehicles.

Among USAREUR drivers, seat belt violations are most common during the holiday season and most commonly detected at installation access control points.

One way the military police enforce seat belt checks is during "Click It or Ticket" checks, which are periodic seat belt checkpoints set up on military installations at the discretion of commanders. The German police perform the same type of checks during roadside safety checks or other traffic enforcement actions.

For a first offense violation of seat belt laws, drivers are given a mandatory seven-day driving privilege suspension and two traffic points are assessed to the offender's driving record; a second offense carries a mandatory 30-day suspension and two points. A third

offense carries 180-day license suspension and two points, and any further seat belt violations carry 180-day suspension and the offender's commander can take further action.

If an offender's traffic point total is 12 or more points in one year, or 18 or more in two years, the USAREUR registrar will notify the offender's commander or supervisor to suspend the offender's USAREUR license for 180 days, according to Army in Europe Regulation 190-1.

If a child passenger is under 12 years old and shorter than 150 centimeters or 59 inches, he must ride in a certified restraint system designed for the size of the child. Restraint systems must meet the age, size, and weight specifications of the child.

Furthermore, if a child safety seat is not installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and approved by either the Department of Transportation or Economic Commission for Europe standard, the driver's commander may assess two traffic points for failure to use a proper restraint system in the vehicle. However, German police can issue citations for failing to install a suitable child restraint system, and that citation may result in a fine.

