

Wednesday, September 11, 2002

Car seat belt use rises while motorcycle helmet use falls As

WASHINGTON (AP) - A patchwork of state policies is inspiring more motorists to buckle their seat belts than ever before but the number of motorcyclists wearing helmets has plummeted, a government study showed Tuesday.

Seat belt use reached 75 percent this year, the highest level since national surveys began in 1994, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Officials there credited the trend in part to education and enforcement efforts such as the "Click it or Ticket" campaign, in which 30 states participated over the Memorial Day weekend.

More and more, people are realizing that seat belts are absolutely the most effective safety device in a car," said Jeffrey W. Runge, administrator of the agency.

Similarly, helmets are the most effective safety device for motorcyclists. The NHTSA estimates that in a crash, such headgear reduces the likelihood of a fatality by 29 percent.

But state laws requiring helmet use unraveled after 1995, when Congress repealed incentives for states to require motorcyclists to wear head protection. Helmet usage has dropped nearly 14 percent since 2000, when the last survey was taken, the agency said.

The contrast between state laws on seat belt and helmet usage reflects a fierce tug-of-

war between highway safety advocates and individual rights activists in the legislatures. State assemblies, experts said, generally tend to pick their battles in favor of seat belt restrictions.

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> > - Judie Stone president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

There is a feeling out there in the legislatures that some laws are easier to pass than others," said Judie Stone, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

Interest groups like Stone's have picked up that cue and spent more effort pressing for states to tighten seat belt restrictions than motorcycle helmet requirements. Besides, she said, the danger of front-seat riders who do not wear seat belts, she said, is simply a bigger public safety problem than the danger of helmet-less motorcyclists.

fic fatalities dropped slightly, from 4 2000 to 41,730 in 2001. Sixty pe those killed in cars and trucks las not wearing a seat belt. NHTSA's increase seat belt usage from 73 to 2001 to 78 percent in 2003, which save an estimated 1,130 lives a year

The agency conducted the three weeks in June, during which? vehicles and 900 motorcycles were for seat belt and helmet use at 2m way and intersection sites. The sure margin of error of 2 percentage po

Motorcycle fatalities rose for his consecutive year, to 3,067, the higher in 11 years. Motorcycle deaths res low point in 1997 with 2,116, or 21% every million miles driven. That was a third of the rate 20 years earlie

use reflects a sharp change in pu since 1995, when the first Republic trolled Congress in 40 years repeak required helmet use.

Since then, five states -Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana and E according to the National Co State Legislatures. Three g Colorado, Illinois and Iowa requirements on helmet use, the gr

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NEWS IN BRIE Husband on tr for shooting w through ceiling

SAVANNAH, Ga. Drunk and angry v wife, Donald Chase pistol to the floor upstairs den and fe bullet passed through pet and the kitcher and killed his wife poured bottles of ligar

Kentucky's impoverished coal-Chase, 56, is now of producing counties dropped sigcharges of murder of 32 years, Jackie O in their stucco town Savannah's historici last September.

Chase's attorney shooting was acciden prosecutors said the old Chase intended to wife, who was struct head by a bullet that through the carpet a carpet pad, 3/4-ind wood and the kitchen sheetrock.

her head?" police investigators in a taped interview sho the shooting that was to jurors Tuesday dun second day of the tri are the chances of t "Infinitesimal," Lt.

Zapal replied on the don't think you could if you wanted to." Chase, who sound

fused on the videotape he had been drinking for three days and was when the shooting of Police said they for empty liquor bottles kitchen.

Towns try to keep mines from opening nearby

LICK CREEK, Ky. (AP) -Susan Skeens and other folks in Lick Creek sprang into action when a coal company moved to open a mine near their homes in this little Appalachian community where the loudest sound at night is often the mournful call of a whippoorwill.

Everything I have will be covered with black dust," said Skeens, whose home is some 250 feet from the proposed entrance to the mine.

Lick Creek's battle to stop the project may be the first of many to come in Kentucky as older coal mines are played out and mining companies move closer to populated areas to dig. In the past, Kentucky's coal

was typically mined deep in the mountains where coal seams were thickest and easiest to dig

But after a century of heavy mining, "the easy coal is ers produced 131 million tons gone," said Tom FitzGerald, an environmental attorney representing Lick Creek residents. "Coal seams that once were considered marginal or problematic now are being mined. Often, they're close to homes."

Roy Mullins, a former coal miner now leading the charge to keep Clintwood Elkhorn Mining Co. from opening the mine in Lick Creek, said residents across the Appalachian coalfields have a vested interest in the case.

"It could be their community next," he said. "We're not trying to shut down a coal com-

pany, and we're not trying to put anyone out of work. But it's ers and industry are often time for the communities to take a stand.

Residents of Lick Creek, a community of about 50 homes in a hollow in eastern the case in Appalachia's coal Kentucky, have staved off the TECO Coal subsidiary for two years by obtaining a state ruling that mining would damage well water.

But TECO spokeswoman Laura Plumb said that now that public water lines have been extended into the community, the state no longer has any reason to stop the underground mine from opening.

Residents disagree. They fear the dust, the noise and

Coal mining is a \$3.5 billion industry in Kentucky, which ranks third, behind Wyoming daily earthquakes. In the small mined. Kentucky's 15,500 minin 2000 and made more than \$678 million in wages, according to the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Marcum, vice president the Kentucky Coal Association, said coal companies try their best to be good neighbors

He said the state does not allow coal companies to begin mining until it is reasonably assured there would be no harm to residential areas. If harm does result, Marcum said, government agencies can step in, imposing fines or even ordering mines to shut down.

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nificantly during the 1990s, with most of the decline attributed to an exodus of people looking for work in urban areas. Other communities across

lation and the spread of devel-

opment into the countryside.

But that does not appear to be

The population of eastern

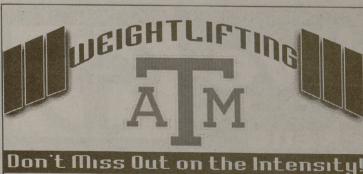
the region are having to live with mines edging ever closer. Residents of McRoberts

blame a nearby mountaintop mine for recurrent flash flooding. Others complain that blasting shakes their homes like and West Virginia, in tons community of Ary, residents complain that dust covers their homes, furniture, even the trees. Earlier this month, authorities evacuated 12 homes at Brushy when blasting sent rocks down a mountainside: one boulder destroyed a mobile

Charles Howard said a mine near Viper is causing his house to sink and subjects his family to the roar of machinery and the beeping of heavy equipment moving in reverse.

"It's miserable," he said. "When I first bought property here, it was just so peaceful, so quiet. Now, you can't sit out-

side in the evening. The noise is totally irritating. (Find your rhythm.) (979) 696.5 721 Texas Ave. S. www.statravel.com ONLINE >> ON THE PHONE >> ON CAMPUS >> ON TH



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