

Live Free or....Die?
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As a safety professional, perhaps more than the average person, I see a lot of behavior that can be deemed unsafe. This is particularly true when it comes to driving motor vehicles. You see it also: drivers talking on cell phones, texting (yes, despite laws prohibiting such behavior, people still believe they can do it safely), eating, reading, etc. Driving has become a very casual task and in so doing it has made driving more dangerous than it is already.

Think about this: when you are traveling at a speed of 65 miles per hour (or faster...or even *slower*), do you feel comfortable, safe, and secure...while you reach for that cup of coffee, or soda, a sandwich, or change the radio channel or CD? Sure. Driving has become part of our *DNA*.

Most New Hampshire residents are familiar with New Hampshire's oversimplification of Patrick Henry's most famous one-liner, "Give me liberty or give me death." The streamlining of this noble quote has been proclaimed on New Hampshire license plates for decades. But, are we *really* so casual about living and dying?

New Hampshire is the *only* state in the country that does not mandate seat belt use for all ages. Is this our independent spirit showing - the result of many who feel oppressed by governmental regulations and in a "strike a blow for freedom" approach, have decided to campaign in whatever forum against a seatbelt law?

One argument goes that the government (any government) should not be dictating what a person does in the privacy of his or her own motor vehicle. The same argument is applied to the helmet issue for bikers who want the freedom to ride without the encumbrance of head protection. Another argument postulates that no law will breed compliance...only contempt.

Is this the argument of a principled society standing on principle?

Or, is it just stubbornness?

Or both?

But, it doesn't matter. A person should be able to recognize the dangers inherent in driving and take reasonable precautions to protect their life and the livelihoods of others. This should be the responsible driver.

Each year, 30-40 thousand people die in automobile crashes. Our workers' compensation trust program has suffered several, and the most recent was within the past year because the driver wasn't wearing his seatbelt. We all know (don't we?) that motor vehicle collisions are the largest cause of workplace fatalities...and there are those who apparently think it won't happen to them.

Some will tell you that when it's "your time" there's nothing you can do about it. Well, what if it is *the driver's* time and you are the passenger? Why is wearing a seatbelt a good idea for persons under 18, but not for those older than 18? Aren't we supposed to become wiser as we age? Knowing what we do about the importance of seatbelt use, what is the issue?

The heart of the issue is not common sense; it is voluntary compliance and our regards for the safety of others in our community. That community goes beyond the borders of our neighborhood, our towns, cities, and our state. Not all drivers take safe driving seriously. The automotive industry, governments, and safety organizations proclaim that seatbelts save lives...and they do. Statistics prove it. But, safe *drivers* save lives – safe drivers try to avoid situations that may result in property damage, injury, and death.

Seatbelts are there in the event that a driver has no control over a situation and is involved in a collision, and it is CONTROL that matters most. Indeed, most drivers really are not in control of their vehicles when they are driving: they are engaged in secondary activities that interfere with the safe operation of their vehicle. Some drivers pay more attention to their *Smartphones* than they do their driving. YOU are driving in among these and other drivers who are not paying attention to their primary task of driving safely. Under these conditions, seatbelts take on heightened and significant importance.

Now, in addition to the aforementioned activities, be aware that many of these same drivers could be under the influence of drugs, prescription, legal, and illegal. Drug abuse is a serious threat to your safety.

While it may be true that you may not be the cause of a collision, just keep in mind that you may be involved in a collision due to poor driving of another driver and become the victim. Whose freedom and whose rights have been violated in this case? To keep one's rights in perspective, ask yourself how many people you have heard openly proclaim their approval for their deceased friends and family members who died for the principle of choosing not to wear a seatbelt?

And, if there are serious injuries and fatalities, who pays for the medical costs? Insurance? And... as costs rise, where do the insurance companies get their money to pay the expenses? They get their money from you and me.

While we may not like the intrusion of government, we must remember that safety regulations (of all types) are in place to reduce the exposure to injury and death, *in the interest of the community*. In the case of motor vehicle safety laws, "Live free or die" might be a clever slogan, but let us remember that with freedom comes responsibility, and when we are out on the highways, we are responsible to each other.

I agree. It shouldn't take a law to force one to wear a seatbelt, or prohibit one from talking on a cell phone or taking part in some activity that distracts the driver from his or her primary responsibility of driving safely. But, absent the laws, the fact remains that you and I have an obligation to drive in such a manner that demonstrates due regard for the safety of others. This is why our state issues a person a license to drive...driving with due regard for the safety of others may be implied, but it is manifest.

If you manage or operate a fleet, make sure you have a seatbelt policy and enforce seatbelt use. And when in your personal vehicle.....go ahead....buckle up, and drive safely!