



## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PRIMARY SEAT BELT LAW APPROVED ON WHITE EARTH RESERVATION**

ST. PAUL — The White Earth Tribal Council in northwestern Minnesota recently approved a primary seat belt law. The law now allows White Earth Police officers to stop and cite White Earth residents who are not wearing seat belts. The law does not apply to nonresidents of the White Earth Indian Reservation.

The state of Minnesota has a secondary seat belt law that requires law enforcement to first stop drivers for another moving violation before citing them for not wearing their seat belt.

White Earth Indian Reservation overlaps parts of Becker, Clearwater and Mahnommen counties.

Between 2004 and 2006 in these counties, 11 of the 21 vehicle occupants who were killed in traffic crashes were not wearing seat belts. Another 80 occupants, one-third of whom were not belted, suffered serious, life-changing injuries in crashes. Seat belt use on the reservation is 61 percent according to White Earth Police Department, far below the state's compliance rate of 85.5 percent.

"Our community experiences far too many injuries that are preventable with seat belt use," said Officer Jerry Cossette, White Earth Police Department. "This law will save lives and prevent injuries."

"I commend White Earth for understanding how important a primary seat belt law is to saving lives and preventing injuries," said Michael Campion, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). "I would encourage the Minnesota Legislature to take up this important issue. A statewide primary law could save 18 to 34 lives a year and prevent 233 to 431 life-changing injuries annually."

Campion added that unbelted motorists seriously injured in traffic crashes have hospital charges 94 percent higher than those belted.

A citation for seat belt non-use in White Earth Indian Reservation would be \$10 or a seatbelt safety course for the first offense for the driver and passenger. Second or subsequent offenses by either a driver or passenger would result in a \$25 fine or a seatbelt safety course.

During 2004–2006 in Minnesota, 1,274 vehicle occupants died in traffic crashes, and 658 (52 percent) of the victims were unbelted. DPS estimates half of those would have survived if they had been belted.

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A two-week, statewide seat belt enforcement effort in May generated 7,700 belt violations. During this campaign White Earth Tribal Police issued 22 belt citations and four tickets for improper child seat restraint use.

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