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**MoDOT and Safety Partners Promote Safest Driver Competition and Buckle Up Phone Down Day**

*October 30 marks the eighth annual BUPD Day*

JEFFERSON CITY – For the eighth year, the Missouri Department of Transportation and the Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety, along with various safety partners, schools and businesses throughout the state, are encouraging better driving behaviors as part of the annual Buckle Up Phone Down Day by aiming for the goal of zero traffic fatalities throughout the day.

To date in 2024, of the more than 600 fatalities in Missouri, 64% of them were unbuckled. Distracted driving is also a leading cause of crashes in Missouri. In 2023, distracted driving was cited in crashes that claimed 104 lives.

In August 2023, the Siddens-Bening Hands-Free Law took effect in Missouri, prohibiting all drivers from using a handheld electronic communication device while driving. The law aims to address distracted driving, which contributed to crashes that claimed the lives of more than 800 people across the state from 2012-2021. Paired with the requirement to wear a seat belt, the enactment of the hands-free legislation means BUPD is officially law in Missouri. Additionally, law enforcement officials have been educating drivers on the new law for the past year, but they will begin to write citations for driving distracted beginning January 2025.

In support of the hands-free law, many Missouri high schools are participating in AAA Missouri’s Show Me Your Score Safe Driver Challenge. This competition will be held through the end of February 2025, and will measure participant’s acceleration, braking, and phone usage habits while behind the wheel through a mobile app. The goal of this is to promote positive driving habits and educate young drivers on how crucial it is to make smart, safe decisions behind the wheel.

“Every single driver plays a role in combatting the safety crisis happening on our roads,” said Missouri State Highway Safety and Traffic Engineer Jon Nelson. “The Safest Driver Competition is a great step in educating the next generation of drivers to make the right decisions behind the wheel. It’s important to be mindful of the shared responsibility we have every time we hit the road.”

Since the creation of BUPD in 2017, Missouri’s seat belt usage rate reached an all-time high and the percentage of fatalities who were unbuckled has decreased. The movement has collected more than 55,000 pledges to BUPD and has expanded to more than a dozen states across the country.

“Despite these successes, there is still a lot of work to be done to eliminate fatalities from our roadways,” said Nelson. “Lives, including your own, are on the line.”

Drivers can accept the challenge to BUPD at [modot.org/bupd](http://www2.modot.org/BuckleUpPhoneDown/) and spread the word on social media using the hashtags #BUPD and #BUPDDay. Registration closes for the Show Me Your Score Safe Driving Challenge on October 30. High schools can sign up at <www.savemolives.com/mcrs/smys>.

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For more information, call MoDOT at 888-ASK-MODOT (275-6636) or visit [www.modot.org](http://www.modot.org). To receive the latest statewide news and text alerts, signup for [e-updates](https://www6.modot.mo.gov/eMoDOTWeb/jsp/signon/signon.jsp).

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