



BUSTING THE MYTHS ON BUCKLING UP

BY AMANDA GAHLING

Car accidents claim the lives of more teenagers than any other age group, mainly because teens aren't wearing seatbelts. Lilliard Richardson, a researcher at the University of Missouri, set out to discover why teens aren't wearing seatbelts. He surveyed teens at licensing offices and met with focus groups in high schools and youth organizations. He found out that teens have many ideas surrounding the use of seatbelts. But is there any truth to them?

MYTH #1: Wearing a seatbelt is more dangerous than not wearing one.

BUSTED: Many teens raised fears that a seatbelt might cut them in half in a crash or trap them if the car is underwater or on fire. It's extremely rare that belts are ever dangerous. On the other hand, 70 percent of the teenagers killed in accidents on Missouri roads are not wearing seatbelts.

MYTH #2: Before an accident occurs, the occupants of the car will have enough time to react and buckle up.

BUSTED: Volkswagen portrayed it best in its recent ad campaign that showed people in a car, when out of nowhere they are blindsided by another vehicle. Even those lucky enough not to get blindsided must deal with the fact that an average accident only provides a reaction time of 1.5 seconds. It takes an average person three seconds to buckle a seatbelt.

MYTH #3: Seatbelts aren't needed when driving short distances because nothing is going to happen.

BUSTED: The most dangerous place to be is close to home. A survey by Progressive Insurance found that 53 percent of all crashes occur five miles or less away from home, and 23 percent of those occur within just one mile. People pay less attention to routes they take several times a day.

MYTH #4: Riding in the backseat is safer than riding in the front, so a seatbelt is not necessary.

BUSTED: Richardson acknowledges that fewer dangers, such as the windshield, dashboard and steering column, lie in the backseat. But it is far from safe. In a crash, unbuckled passengers in the backseat become missiles of destruction flinging around the vehicle at the speed of impact. They can easily cause harm, most often head and neck injuries, to themselves or others.

