

# 2023 Utah Seat Belt Use Survey

## Did you know?

In 1986, our first seat belt survey discovered that only **18%** of Utah motorists used seat belts! Since then, occupant protection programs have been developed, implemented and evaluated, saving countless lives by encouraging individuals to do the number one thing they can do to protect themselves in a crash... wear a seat belt.

Utah's Seat Belt Use Rate in 2023 was **92.4%**

## Executive Summary & Results

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) requires states to conduct observational surveys annually to determine the level of seat belt use. The 18 counties selected for observation in Utah were: Box Elder, Cache, Carbon, Davis, Grand, Iron, Millard, Salt Lake, San Juan, Sanpete, Sevier, Summit, Tooele, Uintah, Utah, Wasatch, Washington, and Weber.

The study was conducted June 5-17, 2023 during which a total of 27,126 vehicle occupants, including 22,123 drivers and 5,003 outboard passengers, were observed. Of the 22,123 vehicles, 27% were cars, 39% sport utility vehicles (SUV), 26% trucks, and 8% were vans.

After a decline in 2021, seat belt usage rates continued an increasing trend in 2023 which started following the passage of a primary enforcement law in 2015. The seat belt use rate among motor vehicle occupants was **92.4% in 2023**, which increased from the 2022 rate of 91.8% and the highest seat belt use rate to date.

In 2023, truck occupants had the lowest seat belt usage rate at 86%, while SUVs and vans had the highest usage rates at 95%. Occupants of trucks showed the largest increase from 2022 levels compared with vans, SUVs, and cars. Seat belt use for drivers was 92.2% and 93.3% for outboard passengers.

Urban counties (Cache, Davis, Salt Lake, Utah, Washington, Weber) were analyzed separately from rural counties. The seat belt usage rate for urban counties was 93.3%, while the rural counties' rate was 89.8%. Summit County had the highest rate at 95.6% followed by Salt Lake County at 95.4%. Cache County had the lowest usage rate at 81.7%.

**Table 2** shows that usage rates were higher in urban counties in all categories.

The study found that female occupants buckled up more often (94.2%) than their male counterparts (91.1%) and this is true for both urban and rural areas except for Millard County.

*Reliability of survey results: The standard error was determined to be 1.14%, well within a standard error of 2.5% as required by NHTSA guidelines.*

**Table 1: Seat Belt Use (%)  
by Vehicle Type, Utah**

	2023	2022	2021
All Vehicles	92.4%	91.8%	88.2%
SUVs	94.9	95.2	91.2
Vans	95.2	94.3	92
Cars	93.1	92.3	88.3
Trucks	86.1	84.4	81.6

**Table 2: Seat belt Use  
by Urban/Rural County**

	Urban	Rural	Total
All Occupants	93.3%	89.8%	92.4%
Females	95	92	94.2
Males	92.1	88.3	91.1
Cars	93.9	89.5	93.1
SUVs	95.4	93.6	94.9
Trucks	86.8	84.8	86.1
Vans	96.1	92.6	95.2

*Note: Surveys prior to 2012 did not include a sampling of Utah's rural counties, so they are not equivalent to current seat belt use survey results. Previously, only the six most urban counties in the state were observed. For more detail, contact the Highway Safety Office.*



## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

The Utah Seat Belt Use Survey shows restraint use by drivers and front seat outboard passengers from the counties in Utah with the greatest motor vehicle fatality rates. Usage rates vary from county to county, especially when comparing urban and rural areas of the state.

**Table 3** presents the seat belt usage rates by county and gender for 2023. Females had a higher rate of seat belt usage compared to males in all counties, except Millard, which also saw the greatest increase in male seat belt usage from 2022. San Juan County observed the largest increase in female seat belt usage. The largest decrease for Females was in Sanpete County and the largest decrease for Males was in Cache County. The counties with the largest gender gaps were Cache, Sanpete, Iron, and San Juan.

**CONCLUSIONS:** With the implementation of a primary seat belt (PSB) law in Utah in 2015, observed usage rates increased from 83.4% before the law to 92.4% in 2023 (relative increase of 10.8%). The logical conclusion is that the implementation of Utah’s primary seat belt law was responsible for the increase in usage of seat belts. Even after a dip in 2021, and not being measured in 2020, seat belt usage rates increased again to 92.4% in 2023, its highest rate so far. This increasing trend held for more than half of the counties.

For the last several years, urban counties continued to have higher usage rates compared to rural counties, with urban counties as a whole having a seat belt usage rate 3.5% higher than rural counties. This urban-rural relationship held for all vehicle types and both genders in 2023. Females continued to use seat belts at a higher rate than males, with an overall difference just greater than 3%. Millard was the only county where males had a higher usage rate compared to females, which was the county where male seat belt usage saw the largest increase from 2022. Another consistent trend is that occupants of SUVs and vans have maintained a higher usage rate compared to other vehicle types, with occupants of trucks remaining at the lowest rate. Vans had a 9.1% higher seat belt usage compared to trucks in 2023. Male truck occupants had the lowest seat belt usage rates. Additionally, higher traffic roads had higher seat belt usage rates compared to lower traffic roads.

**Table 3: Seat Belt Use by County and Gender 2023, Utah (including 2022 use rate by county and % point change)**

County	2023			2022	
	% Female Belted	% Male Belted	% Total Belted	% Total Belted	% Point Change
Box Elder	90.2%	85.5%	87.2%	88.4%	-1.2
Cache	88.5	76.2	81.7	87.4	-5.7
Carbon	83.8	83	83.4	79.9	3.5
Davis	93	90.9	91.9	95.4	-3.5
Grand	95.8	94.4	94.9	93.3	1.6
Iron	89.7	83.6	86.1	87.3	-1.2
Millard	90.2	92.4	91.5	85.8	5.7
Salt Lake	96.8	94.5	95.4	94.5	0.9
San Juan	94.2	88.1	90.7	85	5.7
Sanpete	86.4	78.6	82	87.9	-5.9
Sevier	92.7	87.5	89.6	86.9	2.7
Summit	98.5	93.5	95.6	95.7	-0.1
Tooele	93	90.1	91.1	95.9	-4.8
Uintah	94.9	89.1	91.2	89.5	1.7
Utah	96.8	93.4	94.8	91.4	3.4
Wasatch	92.6	87.8	89.4	85.3	4.1
Washington	89.9	89.7	89.8	88.7	1.1
Weber	95.6	90.7	92.8	91.8	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94.2</b>	<b>91.1</b>	<b>92.4</b>	<b>91.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>

## SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to survey criteria, each state must study seat belt use within a geographic area that accounts for at least 85% of the passenger vehicle crash-related fatalities according to the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data averages for the period 2015-2019. Of Utah’s 29 counties, 18 were selected to be included in this study. Road segments by functional classification (Interstate/Primary, Arterial/Secondary, and Local) were randomly selected using a combination of the UDOT roadway file and the 2015 TIGER data developed by the U.S. Census Bureau. All passenger vehicles with a gross vehicle weight up to 10,000 pounds were included in the survey. A total of 180 sites were selected for the study, which took place for a two-week period in June 2023. In each of the 18 counties, 10 sites were surveyed by trained observers who documented belt use and gender among drivers and outboard front seat passengers for a period of 45 minutes at each location.



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 For complete survey design & methodology contact the Highway Safety Office