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Citing Poor Seatbelt Usage Stats, VIPD Vows Increased Seatbelt Enforcement

Community Center / **Published On April 29, 2021 04:20 PM /**

Staff Consortium **April 29, 2021**

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The V.I. Police Department will step up its seatbelt enforcement efforts in a move aimed at increasing seatbelt usage in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with the police department citing poor statistics compared to the U.S., along with an updated V.I. law that included the usage of backseat seatbelts as enforceable.

"The Virgin Islands Police Department reminds the community that vehicle occupants, despite age and seating position, are required to wear seat belts," a V.I.P.D. release issued Tuesday states. "Through a 2019 amendment to the VI Code - Title 20, Part II, chapter 41, section 466, subsection (b) – seat belt requirements were extended to include rear seat passengers."

Citing results of the USVI's annual Observational Seat Belt Survey, the police force said compliance continues to be a challenge for the territory. In 2020, the seatbelt usage rate for drivers and their front seat passengers declined 2.9 percentage points to 68.2 percent. When compared to a US compliance rate of 90 percent, it is disproportionately low, the V.I.P.D. said.

“Virgin Islanders must take a proactive approach to roadway safety,” said Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor. “Officers will be increasing seat belt enforcement efforts to reduce risks for preventable injuries and untimely fatalities. The law is simple; everyone in the car must be buckled.”

The police department said Virgin Islands motorists will observe increased seatbelt enforcement checkpoints in the upcoming weeks.

Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety Director Daphnie O’Neal appealed to the motoring community to adhere to the law. In 2020 there were 14 fatalities because of vehicle crashes. “Protect your lives and the lives of your passengers. Seat belt compliance saves drivers from costly citation fees and incalculable regrets,” she said.

For more information on seat belts, child car safety seat use or other safe driving practices, contact the Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety by emailing daphne.oneal@vipd.vi.gov, or Occupant Protection Coordinator Denise Gomes at denise.gomes@vipd.vi.gov. You may also contact the office via telephone at (340) 772-3025 or (340) 473-7383.