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# More Virgin Islanders Are Wearing Seatbelts, Data Show, Though Usage Remains Significantly Behind National Rate

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Data generated through the VI Office of Highway Safety's annual Observational Seat Belt Use Survey indicate that Virgin Islands motorists and their front seat passengers are wearing seat belts more consistently, the V.I. Police Department has made known via release.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), seat belts are proven to reduce risks for crash-related injuries and fatalities.

Each year, Highway Safety hires an independent contractor to assess seat belt usage in the territory. When compared to the national seat belt use rate which averages over 90 percent, the territory's use rate reflects a deficient safety culture, according to the data. In 2019, the territory

recorded a use rate of 71.1 percent, which declined to 68.2% in 2020. However, in 2021, the territory achieved a statistically significant increase to 72.3 percent.

“Although as a territory, we still have considerable strides to make in increasing compliance and improving crash outcomes for residents and visitors, we are encouraged by the growth recorded by this year’s survey,” expressed Police Commissioner Ray Martinez. “Law enforcement will continue to make active and visible efforts to enforce the law and protect our citizenry.”

According to the release, through a robust media campaign and educational outreach efforts, the V.I. Office of Highway safety was able to reach the community with seat belt safety messaging. “It is our hope that the community heard our messaging and will continue to make informed decisions for themselves and their families,” stated Highway Safety Director Daphnie O’Neal. “Our lives are worth protecting,” Director O’Neal 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 through Ms. O’Neal at [daphne.oneal@vipd.vi.gov](mailto:daphne.oneal@vipd.vi.gov), or Occupant Protection Planner / Coordinator Denise Gomes at [denise.gomes@vipd.vi.gov](mailto:denise.gomes@vipd.vi.gov). You may also contact the office via telephone at (340) 772-3025 or (340) 473-7383.