



# SAFE DRIVER MANUAL

---

Improving Seatbelt Usage &  
Preventing Distracted Drivers

---

# Table of Contents

Purpose.....	2	Distracted Driving Q&A .....	6
Seatbelt Q&A .....	3	APPENDIX:	
Seatbelt Facts .....	4	Model Seatbelt/Restraint Policy.....	7
Seatbelt-Related Training .....	4	Model Distracted Driving Policy .....	7
Code of Iowa Section 321.445.....	5		

**Purpose**

This manual was developed to help IMWCA members create, train on, and enforce policies that support safe driving practices. It offers guidance for employees and elected officials on how to improve safety when operating vehicles and equipment for work-related purposes.

While employees are expected to comply with state laws and employer policies, it is ultimately the employer’s responsibility to ensure accountability. Relying solely on law enforcement to enforce seatbelt and distracted driving laws creates gaps in protection. Ensuring the safety of employees behind the wheel and at the controls of equipment is a responsibility that rests squarely with your organization’s leadership.



# Seatbelt Q&A

## **Q: Why should my city/county or agency have a seatbelt policy?**

**A:** Employees are the most valuable resource that any organization has. While vehicles and off-road equipment is getting more sophisticated, we still need employees to operate them. In the course of their jobs, many employees are exposed to traffic hazards that can kill or seriously injure them. Using a seatbelt is the quickest and simplest way to protect your employees. A seatbelt policy makes it clear to an employee when they will wear seatbelts and the potential ramifications for not following the policy.

## **Q: We follow the state law regarding seatbelt usage. Why do I need policy for my organization?**

**A:** State law is a start, but it doesn't cover off-road equipment. Many managers feel that enforcement of the law is a law enforcement matter, when in fact it is a workplace safety matter. Further, state law only requires adults in front seats of on-road vehicles to be belted.

## **Q: Aren't municipal employees exempt from state law of seatbelt usage?**

**A:** No, there is no exemption in Code of Iowa Sec. 321.445 in the state law for municipal employees.

## **Q: We stop and start a lot. Aren't we exempt from using seatbelts then?**

**A:** Not always. Code of Iowa Section 321.445 states that only drivers and occupants on set routes (garbage routes, delivery and meter reading routes) which require the employees to frequently get in and out of vehicles are not required to wear seatbelts while on the route and moving less than 25 miles per hour.

## **Q: We drive the speed limit in town. Why do we have to wear the seatbelt?**

**A:** You might be going the speed limit, but the person that hits you might not. Even if both vehicles were going the speed limit, the combined force can still cause serious injury when you are thrown about the cab.

## **Q: I operate a slow-moving, off-road machine. Do I have to wear the seatbelt?**

**A:** If the manufacturer designed the machinery with a seatbelt and roll-over system, then the designer envisioned use. We have had fatalities in this type of equipment, because the employee was thrown from the equipment and crushed or suffered serious injury by being tossed violently in the cab.

## **Q: Does the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cover seatbelts?**

**A:** Possibly under the general duty clause.

## **Q: Our vehicles are equipped with air bags. Don't they take the place of seatbelts?**

**A:** No, airbags are a supplemental safety feature. They are designed to be effective only when occupants are wearing seatbelts. In reality, not wearing a seatbelt when an air bag is deployed can cause a person to be shoved around the cabin of the vehicle.

# Seatbelt Facts

Since 1987, IMWCA has incurred eight fatal vehicle events. In every case, the deceased employee was not wearing a seatbelt. The eight claims totaled \$4,300,000 in losses for an average of \$537,500 per person lost.

However, the biggest costs is unquantifiable in terms of the spouses, children and loved ones left behind. In the same time, since 1987, there has never had a fatal vehicle accident when the employee was wearing a seatbelt.



**▶ See IMWCA Online Learn Course:**

- *Driver Safety*
- *Backhoe Safety with Trackhoe Supplement*
- *Bulldozer Safety*
- *Defensive Driving*
- *Defensive Driving Refresher*
- *Driving Around Animals*
- *Driving in Adverse Weather*
- *Dump Truck Safety*
- *Light Trucks: Handling Extreme Conditions*
- *Road Grader Safety*
- *Snow Plow Safety*
- *Space and Time Management*
- *Survival Driving - Emergencies and Natural Disasters*
- *Survival Driving - Urban Driving*



# Seatbelt and Safety Harness Requirements – Iowa Law

## Code of Iowa Section 321.445

### 1. Vehicles Must Have Seatbelts

All motor vehicles (except motorcycles and motorized bicycles) manufactured in 1966 or later and registered in Iowa must be equipped with seatbelts and harnesses that meet federal safety standards.

### 2. Seatbelt Use is Required

In Iowa, drivers and front-seat passengers in these vehicles must wear properly fastened seatbelts whenever the vehicle is moving on a street or highway.

#### Exceptions:

- Vehicles not required to have seatbelts
- Drivers and workers exiting and entering the vehicle frequently (if driving under 25 mph between stops)
- U.S. Postal Service rural letter carriers while delivering mail
- Bus passengers
- People with a medical exemption certified by a licensed provider
- Passengers in emergency vehicles during emergency transport (drivers must still wear seatbelts)
- The Iowa Department of Transportation, in cooperation with public safety and education departments, provides public education to encourage compliance.

### 3. Enforcement

- Both the driver and front-seat passengers can be cited for not wearing seatbelts.
- Drivers are not responsible for passengers 14 or older unless that passenger has a disability.
- The vehicle owner can be cited if the vehicle does not have required safety equipment.



### 4. Seatbelt Use in Civil Lawsuits

- For accidents before July 1, 1986: Seatbelt nonuse cannot be used in court.
- For accidents on or after July 1, 1986:
  - Not wearing a seatbelt cannot be used as comparative fault.
  - However, it may reduce the damages awarded (by up to 5%) if:
    - Substantial evidence shows that not wearing a seatbelt contributed to the injuries.
    - The court agrees that failure to wear a seatbelt affected the extent of the injury.

### 5. Rules for Persons with Disabilities

The Iowa DOT may adopt rules allowing exceptions to seatbelt laws for individuals with disabilities who use collapsible wheelchairs and sit in front seats.

# Distracted Driving Q&A

## Q: What Is distracted driving?

**A:** Distracted driving is any activity that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the stereo, entertainment or navigation system—anything that takes your attention away from the task of safe driving. Texting is the most alarming distraction. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for five seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed. You cannot drive safely unless the task of driving has your full attention. Any non-driving activity you engage in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of crashing.

## Q: Why is distracted driving a big deal for city and county drivers?

**A:** Vehicle accidents are some of the most serious claims for IMWCA and its members. Distracted driving is the number one contributing factor for both on-road and off-road vehicle-related injuries including a number of fatalities

## Q: What are the most common causes of distracted driving for local government employees?

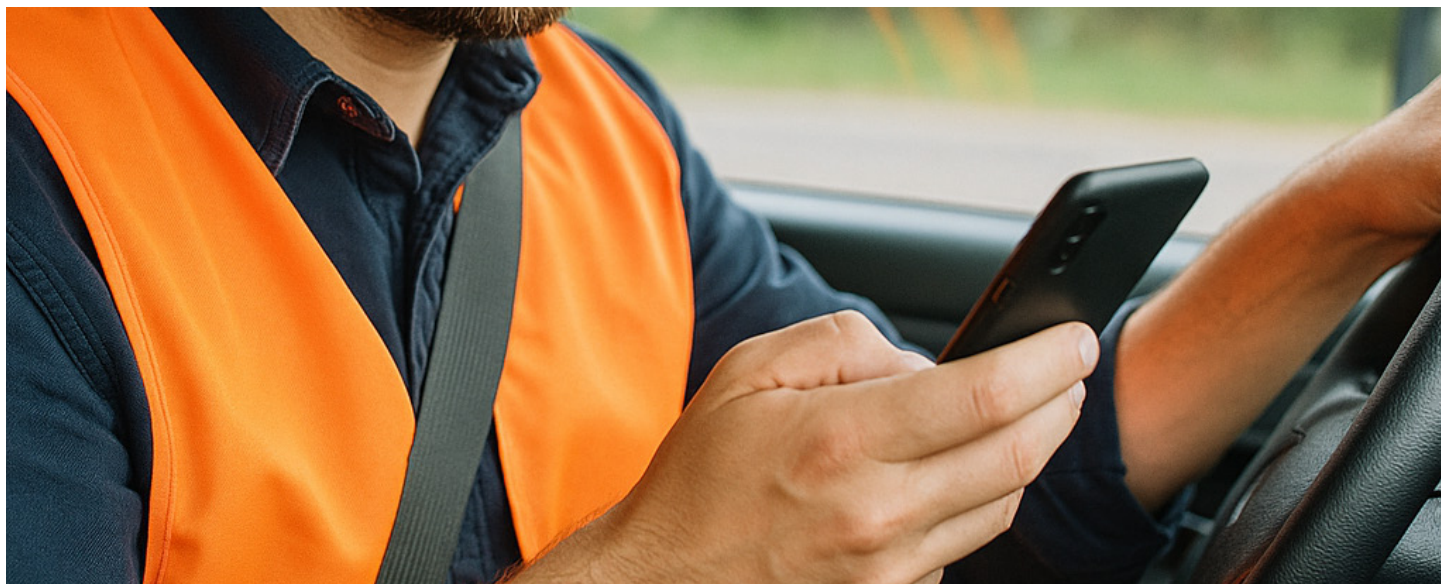
**A:** Generally cell phone usage is the most common, but in law enforcement reading computer screens is the most common distraction. Other distracting activities include eating, looking at reports, and reaching for objects on the floor or back seat..

## Q: Does the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cover incidents involving distracted driving?

**A:** Possibly under the general duty clause. Distracted driving for forklifts and skid steers may fall under the Section 1910. 178 Powered Industrial Trucks standard.

## Q: Do we need a distracted driver policy if we follow state law?

**A:** Yes, Code of Iowa Section 321.276 (2017) is a start. However, it doesn't cover off-road equipment and other forms of distraction besides texting. Some managers feel that enforcement of the law is a law enforcement matter, however it is actually a workplace safety matter.



## APPENDIX: *Model Seatbelt/Restraint Policy*

### **Purpose**

This policy was created to protect the safety of our employees while operating official vehicles, equipment, and personal and rental cars on official business.

 [\*Download Model Seatbelt/Restraint Policy\*](#)

## APPENDIX: *Model Distracted Driving Policy*

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safety of those individuals who driver a vehicle and/or a personal vehicle for work purposes. Distracted driving is a serious safety risk, not only to the driver but to other passengers in the car and drivers/passengers and pedestrians on the road.

 [\*Download Model Distracted Driving Policy\*](#)