



News Release

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NEW TRAFFIC SAFETY LAWS GO INTO EFFECT JULY FIRST

Motorists Required to Move Over for Vehicles Displaying Amber Lights

16, 17 Year Old Passengers Now Subject to Primary Enforcement for Not Wearing a Seatbelt

RICHMOND, VA (Tuesday, June 22, 2010) – Effective July 1, 2010, two new traffic safety laws in Virginia will help to protect not only tow truck drivers and highway workers but also help to ensure that 16 and 17 year old passengers are buckled up. AAA Mid-Atlantic and other transportation safety advocates applaud the changes, which they believe will help to save lives on the Commonwealth's roadways.

During the 2010 session, Virginia lawmakers voted to expand the Commonwealth's *Move Over* law to include protection for tow truck drivers and highway workers who display amber colored flashing lights. The current law applies only to motorists approaching emergency vehicles displaying red or blue flashing lights, which are generally displayed by police, fire and rescue. In addition to protecting vehicles displaying red or blue lights, Virginia's new law also mandates that motorists, approaching a tow truck or highway maintenance vehicle displaying amber lights, change lanes away from the flashing lights, if possible to do so safely, and/or proceed with caution given the prevailing highway conditions. When the new law goes into effect on July 1st, Virginia will join 38 other states that already recognize the dangers faced by these individuals and the need to give them added protection while they work. The offense is punishable as a traffic infraction.

Delegate Glenn Oder sponsored the House Bill 1159, which enacts the change. "The *Move Over Law* in Virginia has proven to be an effective tool in protecting our police and first responders during traffic incidents," said Delegate Oder. "The time has come to recognize that our tow truck drivers and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) workers face the same danger as they fulfill their duties. I am hopeful that this new law will prevent further tragedies to the people who serve in this industry."

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The unfortunate and preventable death of Andy Starmer, a tow truck driver who was struck and killed on the shoulder of Interstate 64 in Newport News in August of 2009, highlighted the need for such a law and helped lawmakers see the need for the change. Andy did everything right on the night of August 9th when he arrived to assist a stranded motorist – he pulled onto the right shoulder, was wearing reflective clothing and had his truck’s amber lights flashing – and yet he was struck and killed by another vehicle on the highway.

VDOT workers are afforded the protection as well. “Highway work zones are one of the most dangerous places for both drivers and our workers,” said Acting VDOT Commissioner Greg Whirley. “Moving over to allow more distance between your vehicle and the highway workers will result in greater safety for everyone.”

The Virginia State Police also support the change. “This is more than just a courtesy – this law is intended to save lives,” said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “Drivers must remember, there are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers working the road every day to help motorists. Whether the job is removing a disabled vehicle, repairing our roads, or stopping a reckless driver – all of us need the room to do our work safely, so, we can return home to our families at the end of the day.”

The second change impacting motorist safety will require 16 and 17 year old passengers to wear seat belts in the back seat of a vehicle and subject them to primary enforcement for lack of belt use in any passenger seat. SB 219, sponsored by Senator Janet Howell, accomplished this change. “A high school teacher from Herndon, Barbara Glakas, suggested the bill. During her career, she had known several students who died or were seriously injured because they were not wearing a seat belt in the back seat. It was always a needless tragedy,” said Senator Howell. “Teens we talked to were prepared to wear seat belts in the back seat ‘if it was the law’ but not otherwise. Fortunately, the General Assembly saw the wisdom of requiring those under 18 to wear their seatbelt. Hopefully, we will avoid many tragedies.”

The following chart highlights the new seat belt law:

	Seat Belt Required Primary Enforcement	Seat Belt Required Secondary Enforcement	Change to Current Law
Driver at any age		X	No Change - Required to buckle up
Front Seat Passenger 18 and over		X	No Change - All required by law to buckle up
Front Seat Passenger Under 18	X		Changed from secondary to primary enforcement for ages 16 and 17
Back Seat Passenger under 18	X		16 and 17 year olds now required to buckle up AND are subject to primary enforcement
Back Seat Passenger 18 and over			No change to the current law - no seat belt required

Note: Primary enforcement allows a police officer to pull and ticket motorists for failure to comply with the law. A secondary enforcement law only allows police to ticket motorists for the infraction if they first witness another offense for which they may stop the motorist. Only then would they be permitted to ticket for non compliance of, for example, the seat belt law.

AAA strongly supported both bills during the 2010 General Assembly. “AAA salutes lawmakers for providing protection for not only AAA affiliated tow truck operators who provide close to 225,000 tows annually but also all of the other towing service providers in Virginia. AAA also believes that any strengthening of Virginia’s seat belt law will increase the number of lives saved on our roads and highways. Our hope is that teenagers and their parents will embrace the new law as one that could save their lives in the event of a crash,” said Martha Mitchell Meade, Manger of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic.

AAA Mid-Atlantic serves nearly 830,000 members in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is the nation’s fifth largest auto club with over 3.6 million members in Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Virginia. It provides a wide range of personal insurance, travel, financial and automotive services through its 50-plus retail branches, regional operations centers, and the Internet. For more information on AAA Mid-Atlantic, please visit our web site at www.AAA.com and our blog at aaa.com/community.

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