

321.445 Safety belts and safety harnesses — use required.

1. Except for motorcycles or motorized bicycles, 1966 model year or newer motor vehicles subject to registration in Iowa shall be equipped with safety belts and safety harnesses which conform with federal motor vehicle safety standard numbers 209 and 210 as published in 49 C.F.R. § 571.209 – 571.210 and with prior federal motor vehicle safety standards for seat belt assemblies and seat belt assembly anchorages applicable for the motor vehicle's model year.

2. a. The driver and front seat occupants of a type of motor vehicle that is subject to registration in Iowa, except a motorcycle or a motorized bicycle, shall each wear a properly adjusted and fastened safety belt or safety harness any time the vehicle is in forward motion on a street or highway in this state except that a child under eighteen years of age shall be secured as required under section 321.446.

b. This subsection does not apply to:

(1) The driver or front seat occupants of a motor vehicle which is not required to be equipped with safety belts or safety harnesses.

(2) The driver and front seat occupants of a motor vehicle who are actively engaged in work which requires them to alight from and reenter the vehicle at frequent intervals, providing the vehicle does not exceed twenty-five miles per hour between stops.

(3) The driver of a motor vehicle while performing duties as a rural letter carrier for the United States postal service. This exemption applies only between the first delivery point after leaving the post office and the last delivery point before returning to the post office.

(4) Passengers on a bus.

(5) A person possessing a written certification from a health care provider licensed under chapter 148 or 151 on a form provided by the department that the person is unable to wear a safety belt or safety harness due to physical or medical reasons. The certification shall specify the time period for which the exemption applies. The time period shall not exceed twelve months, at which time a new certification may be issued unless the certifying health care provider is from a United States military facility, in which case the certificate may specify a longer period of time or a permanent exemption.

(6) Front seat occupants of an authorized emergency vehicle while they are being transported in an emergency. However, this exemption does not apply to the driver of the authorized emergency vehicle.

c. The department, in cooperation with the department of public safety and the department of education, shall establish educational programs to foster compliance with the safety belt and safety harness usage requirements of this subsection.

3. The driver and front seat passengers may be each charged separately for improperly used or nonused equipment under subsection 2. However, the driver shall not be charged for a violation committed by a passenger who is fourteen years of age or older unless the passenger is unable to properly fasten a seat belt due to a temporary or permanent disability. The owner of the motor vehicle may be charged for equipment violations under subsection 1.

4. a. The nonuse of a safety belt or safety harness by a person is not admissible or material as evidence in a civil action brought for damages in a cause of action arising prior to July 1, 1986.

b. In a cause of action arising on or after July 1, 1986, brought to recover damages arising out of the ownership or operation of a motor vehicle, the failure to wear a safety belt or safety harness in violation of this section shall not be considered evidence of comparative fault under section 668.3, subsection 1. However, except as provided in section 321.446, subsection 6, the failure to wear a safety belt or safety harness in violation of this section may be admitted to mitigate damages, but only under the following circumstances:

(1) Parties seeking to introduce evidence of the failure to wear a safety belt or safety harness in violation of this section must first introduce substantial evidence that the failure to wear a safety belt or safety harness contributed to the injury or injuries claimed by the plaintiff.

(2) If the evidence supports such a finding, the trier of fact may find that the plaintiff's failure to wear a safety belt or safety harness in violation of this section contributed to the plaintiff's claimed injury or injuries, and may reduce the amount of plaintiff's recovery

by an amount not to exceed five percent of the damages awarded after any reductions for comparative fault.

5. The department shall adopt rules pursuant to chapter 17A providing exceptions from application of subsections 1 and 2 for front seats and front seat passengers of motor vehicles owned, leased, rented, or primarily used by persons with disabilities who use collapsible wheelchairs.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §321.445]

84 Acts, ch 1016, §3; 86 Acts, ch 1009, §2; 86 Acts, ch 1211, §43; 87 Acts, ch 120, §5; 92 Acts, ch 1175, §37; 96 Acts, ch 1129, §79; 97 Acts, ch 104, §21; 97 Acts, ch 108, §26; 98 Acts, ch 1080, §6, 7; 2002 Acts, ch 1119, §50; 2004 Acts, ch 1113, §1; 2008 Acts, ch 1088, §122; 2010 Acts, ch 1061, §180; 2010 Acts, ch 1079, §10; 2010 Acts, ch 1186, §6, 7

Referred to in §321.210, 321.446, 321.555, 805.8A(14c)

[P] For applicable scheduled fines, see §805.8A, subsection 14, paragraph c