



Shadow biking

Mark Davis/Daily Nebraskan

Cynthia Halbert Taylor soaks up the sun on a ride downtown past the Earl Carter lumber yard at 19th and S. Forecasts predict sunshine through Sunday.

Seat-belt law up for vote

By Pamela Alward
Staff Reporter

Although Nebraska's safety-belt law faces a crucial test before a November popular vote, officials involved with the safety-belt program contend the law has saved lives.

Forty-seven fewer lives were lost in auto accidents during 1985 than in 1984, said Fred Zwonechek, director of Nebraska Highway Safety. In 1984, 285 people died on Nebraska roads compared with 238 in 1985.

"It's a difficult thing to directly attribute to safety belts, although safety belts are a large factor," Zwonechek said.

In November, voters will decide to keep or repeal the law, passed by the 1985 Legislature. A summer-long referendum drive gathered enough signatures to place the issue on the 1986 general election ballot.

The law requires all front-seat passengers to buckle up in cars made since 1972, with a few exceptions. The fine is \$25 for noncompliance in every case, but the vehicle initially must be stopped for another offense.

The law wasn't in effect until Sept. 6, 1985, but the 1985 statistics reflect increased use of safety belts because the public awareness campaign began much earlier, Zwonechek said.

"I don't think there's any question it is the primary reason safety belt usage went from 1 percent to 46 percent," he said.

Statistics indicate one life is saved for every 1 percent increase in safety belt usage, he said, so at least 35 lives should have been saved by the law.

In October, the number of serious traffic injuries decreased for the first time in five years, Zwonechek said.

Dena Bogle, coordinator of the Nebraska Safety Belt Program, said Nebraska topped all states in reducing traffic fatalities in 1985. Like Zwonechek, she said the safety belt awareness effort was a key factor.

"This was our lowest fatality rate since the 1940s," Bogle said.

A visual observation survey showed women comply with the law more often than men, she said. Women buckled up 52 percent of the time and men 34 percent of the time. Nebraskans in metropolitan areas comply 56 percent of the time, she said, with usage rates a few points lower in central and southeast Nebraska and lowest in the west and northeast areas of the state.

Locally, Lt. Jerry Smith of the Lincoln Police Department reported 278 tickets were written for safety belt violations during September and November.

Statewide, Zwonechek said, at least

500 safety-belt violation tickets were written from Sept. 6 through November.

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