

Vehicle Pet Restraints

This IPRO report examines the costs and benefits of enacting vehicle pet restraint legislation in Iowa.

Overview

Legislation mandating vehicle pet restraints has come to public attention recently as many states seek to decrease traffic accidents by regulating driver distractions such as cell phone use. In 2009, there were 56,237 motor vehicle accidents in Iowa resulting in 19,915 injuries and 372 fatalities.¹ According to an AAA report, motor vehicle accidents cost each American an average of \$1,000 a year.² This means that Iowans spend approximately \$3 million on traffic related accidents. And these cost figures do not include traffic fatalities. Pet restraint legislation aims to both reduce distraction-related traffic accidents and to limit injury during vehicle collisions.

In a survey of pet owners conducted by AAA and Kurgo, a pet-restraint manufacturer, 31 percent admitted to being distracted by their dogs while driving, and 59 percent have admitted to engaging with their pet in at least one distracting behavior while driving.³ The survey also indicated 80 percent of pet owners drive with their pets, but only 17 percent use any form of pet restraint.⁴ Seven states currently have pet restraint legislation applying to the exterior portion of a vehicle such as the bed of a pick-up truck.⁵ As of November 2010, there is no legislation in any state requiring pets to be restrained inside the passenger area of a moving vehicle.⁶

Types of Animal Restraints

Types of animal restraints include cages, car seats, and dog seatbelts. In addition, vehicle pet barriers can confine pets to the rear of the vehicle and away from the driver.⁷ Costs for these restraints can range from \$25 to \$150 on average depending on the method chosen.

¹ "Office of Driver Services." *Iowa Department of Transportation*. Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.iowadot.gov/mvd/ods/index.htm>>.

² Clifford, Catherine. "AAA Report Says That Car Accidents Cost Americans \$164.2 B." *CNN Business*. CNN, 05 Mar. 2008. Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <http://money.cnn.com/2008/03/05/news/economy/AAA_study/>.

³ Hyde, C. (2010, August 18). *One in Five respondents to AAA/Kurgo survey admit to driving with dog in their lap*. Retrieved from AAA: <http://www.aaanewsroom.net/Main/Default.asp?CategoryID=7&ArticleID=789>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Redding, Jillian L. "Laws on securing animals being transported in a vehicle." *Connecticut General Assembly*. 14 May 2009. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/rpt/2009-R-0203.htm>>.

⁶ McCormick, L. W. (2008, January 16). *New Group Promotes Buckle-Up Laws for Pets*. Retrieved from ConsumerAffairs.com: http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2008/01/pet_seatbelts.html

⁷ "Dog Car Restraint Review: When You Need To Protect Your Pooch From Harm." *Dog Supplies Advisor*. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.dog-supplies-advisor.com/dog-car-restraint.html>>.

Costs of Pet restraint legislation

Unnecessary

Some people may view pet restraint legislation as unnecessary at a time when state governments may prefer to focus on combating the economic crisis.⁸

Economic costs of enforcement

The cost of enforcing pet restraint legislation should be similar to the costs of enforcing cell phone driving bans, which means enforcement may be difficult.

Invasive

Vehicle pet restraint legislation could be perceived as over-regulation of private activities by the government.

Equipment Costs

Drivers would be required to purchase restraints for their pets if they want to drive with them in the vehicle.

Benefits of Pet Restraint Legislation

Economic Benefits

Implementing fines for drivers who do not use vehicle pet restraints would generate revenue for the state. Exact numbers are unavailable, but similar legislation designed to curb texting while driving in Iowa was expected to charge \$100 per violation⁹.

Additionally, reducing pet related crashes could save the state money, especially given the very high costs of traffic accidents in terms of monetary damage to vehicles, health care costs and human lives.

Health and Safety Benefits

During an auto accident, unrestrained animals can cause injury to humans. According to an AAA study, an unrestrained 10-pound dog in a crash at 50 mph will exert roughly 500 pounds of pressure, while an unrestrained 80-pound dog in a crash at only 30 mph will exert 2,400 pounds of pressure.¹⁰

⁸ Parker-Pope, Tara. "Pets and Distracted Driving." *The New York Times*. 19 May 2010. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <[http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/19/pets-and-distracted-driving/?scp=1&sq=california pet driving&st=cse](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/19/pets-and-distracted-driving/?scp=1&sq=california+pet+driving&st=cse)>.

⁹ "Online Resources for Commercial Vehicle Operators." *Iowa Department of Transportation*. Web. 15 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.iowadot.gov/curbitclickit/cvoperators.html>>.

¹⁰ Hyde, C. (2010, August 18). *One in Five respondents to AAA/Kurgo survey admit to driving with dog in their lap*. Retrieved from AAA: <http://www.aaanewsroom.net/Main/Default.asp?CategoryID=7&ArticleID=789>

Current State Legislation

Seven states currently have legislation regarding animal restraints in moving vehicles. In four states, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Rhode Island, dogs must be secured or restrained while on the exterior portion of a vehicle.¹¹ In Massachusetts and California, all animals must be restrained while riding on the exterior part of a vehicle.¹² Only Hawaii explicitly forbids drivers from holding a pet on their lap.¹³ However, in Arizona, Connecticut, and Maine, distracted driving laws can be used to charge drivers with pets on their laps.

Recent Legislation Attempts

In 2008, bills regarding pets in moving vehicles were presented in California and Virginia. Neither became law.

The legislation in Virginia would have amended existing legislation on distracted driving to include drivers who: had pets on their laps, allowed their pets to impede access to vehicle controls, or whose pets obstructed their vision.¹⁴ The bill was referred to the committee on transportation.

California's legislation would have fined drivers with unrestrained pets on their laps or in the car. The fiscal effect of the legislation was marked as unknown on the bill.¹⁵ The legislature passed the bill, but Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed it saying that he would only pass high priority legislation at that time in an effort to force the legislature to confront what he perceived to be more important issues.¹⁶

Virginia Commonwealth University Pilot Study

The Virginia Commonwealth University pilot study aimed to collect more specific information about driver distraction in Virginia. In 2002, police were encouraged to report crashes caused by driver distraction and to assess the source of distraction. The study found that pets were a contributing factor in .8 percent of vehicle crashes caused by distraction in Virginia.¹⁷ Up to 45 percent of all crashes were distraction related.¹⁸ The two biggest causes of driver distraction were "dazzled drivers (sunglare or headlights)" and "checking for traffic" which together accounted for 26 percent of all sources of distraction.¹⁹

¹¹ Redding, Jillian L. "Laws on securing animals being transported in a vehicle." *Connecticut General Assembly*. 14 May 2009. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/rpt/2009-R-0203.htm>>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Frisman, Paul. "Pets in Cars and Distracted Driving." *Connecticut General Assembly*. 17 Dec. 2009. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/rpt/2009-R-0458.htm>>.

¹⁴ Virginia House Bill, H.R. 533 (2009).

¹⁵ California Congressional Bill, AB 2233 (2008).

¹⁶ Parker-Pope, Tara. "Pets and Distracted Driving." *The New York Times*. 19 May 2010. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <[http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/19/pets-and-distracted-driving/?scp=1&sq=california pet driving&st=cse](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/19/pets-and-distracted-driving/?scp=1&sq=california%20pet%20driving&st=cse)>.

¹⁷ Regan, Michael A., John D. Lee, Kristie L. Young. Driver distraction: theory, effects, and mitigation. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Iowa State Action

Iowa does not currently have any legislation regarding vehicle pet restraints.

This report was prepared in November 2010 by the Iowa Policy Research Organization (IPRO), a non-partisan public policy undergraduate research group at the University of Iowa. For additional research on this or other issues, please visit our website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ipro/> or contact us at caroline-tolbert@uiowa.edu.