

Y6 Peer Power- Safer Streets

Seat belts

Seat belts are now seen as essential safety features, but that wasn't always the case. It took years of effort by campaign groups and Members of Parliament to make wearing them mandatory.

Since 1968, car-makers have had to put seat belts in their cars but it wasn't until 1983 that drivers had to wear them by law. Following the first attempt by MPs to make seat belt-wearing compulsory in 1973, 11 more attempts were made before the law was successfully changed.

Many people complained about having to wear a seat belt. Some thought they should be free to choose whether they wore a seat belt or not. Others said they found seat belts uncomfortable, or said that seat belts might encourage people to drive more aggressively because they felt safer.

Soon after the law was passed, around 90% of people began regularly wearing seat belts. In 1989, the law changed to require children in the back seats of cars to wear them as well. Two years later, this was extended to adult passengers. Today, rates of seat belt-wearing are even higher, with 98% of people recorded as using them in 2014.



Drink-driving

In the mid-1960s the number of cars on British roads was on the rise, and thousands of deaths were linked to drink-driving.

At the time, being drunk in charge of a vehicle was technically illegal but there was no legal definition of what counted as an unsafe level of intoxication.

After legal amendments that, among other things, made it a crime to attempt to drive under the influence of drink or drugs, a campaign was launched in 1954 that aimed to encourage drivers to think about how much they drank before getting behind the wheel. Eleven years later, Transport Minister Barbara Castle announced new plans to combat drink-driving through a new road safety law.

The Road Safety Act 1967 set a blood alcohol limit of 80mg per 100ml, and introduced the breathalyser test to help enforce it. Since then, the number of deaths from drink-driving has dropped significantly, from around 2,000 per year to a few hundred.

Public opinion against drink-driving is also growing stronger. Research released by Public Health England in 2016 found 77% of people support reducing the blood alcohol limit in England and Wales to 50mg per 100ml – the same as it is in Scotland and most European countries. Another 82% said they don't think any drinking is acceptable before getting behind the wheel.

