

Automakers may seek time to install alarm for rear seat belts

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Mumbai, 23 September

Passenger vehicle makers may ask for more time to install the seat belt reminder alarm feature for passengers in the rear seats as it will require “structural changes” to be made to the vehicle.

The reason why the feature cannot be immediately implemented is that the three-point seat belts are required to be anchored to a structural support, explained an official at a car company. These are usually the pillars of the vehicle chassis. The middle seat at the rear will probably require an anchor on the structure, which in turn would necessitate structural changes and hence testing.

“The seat belt reminder will also require additional sensors and integration with the existing wiring harness system.” The automakers are therefore likely to make a representation and seek more time just like the airbags, the official added.

Sunjay Kapur, president, Automotive Component Manufacturers Association said, “Safety is our top priority. And I don’t think you can put a price on human safety. Every OEM (original equipment manufacturers) and component manufacturer has a strong focus on safety.”

Rear seatbelts already exist in almost all vehicles and making it a law to buckle up is the right thing to do, he said. “Road accidents in India kill one person every four minutes and that’s not a good statistic. Driver training is also extremely important,” he added.

A draft notification issued by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways earlier this week proposes to make seat belt reminders mandatory for all ‘front-facing rear seats’ as part of the standard safety equipment in M (four-wheel passenger carriers) and N category (four-wheel goods carriers) of vehicles.

A majority of the passenger vehicles (nine out of ten) have two three-point seat belts — anchored to the C-pillar of



SAFETY MATTERS

The additional safety features

- Aimed at enhancing vehicular and road safety
- Meant to alert the driver when driver or co-driver and all other front-facing seat occupants do not use the safety belt

First-level warning includes

- Visual warning when the ignition switch is engaged and the driver's and/or co-driver's or front facing seat occupants' safety belt is not fastened
- An audible warning can be added as an option

Second-level warning includes

- Activation of a visual and audible warning when a driver operates a vehicle without fastening of driver and/or co-driver or front-facing seat occupants' safety belt

the car. A three-point belt is the standard seat belt that combines both a lap belt and a sash belt to create a three-point system that covers the chest, pelvis, and shoulders.

The center seat, however, only has a lap belt. The three-point belt which restricts the movement of both the hip and the chest in the event of a crash or sudden

braking is safer than the lap belt, which only restrains the hip movement.

Only 30 per cent of the car models in India will have three-point seat belt for the center seat at the rear, while the remaining 70 per cent don't have it. But these 70 per cent constitute 90 per cent of the industry volume, said the official cited above.

Additionally, only 5-10 per cent cars will have a reminder for seat occupants, said the official. To remind the rear seat passengers to buckle up will require installing sensors — one to sense whether or not the seat is occupied and the second to detect whether one is buckled in, he said.

As per a study conducted by a market research firm a few years ago, while the front seat belt reminder is mandatory by law, as many as 70 per cent of people in the front people don't wear seat belts. Therefore, an alarm is no guarantee of compliance, said an official at another carmaker.

“While installing an alarm system can still be done at short notice, having a third seat belt will require structural changes to be made to the car,” echoed said an official at a car company, who did not wish to be identified.

A spokesperson at Tata Motors said, the company is currently “studying the draft amendment. At Tata Motors, we are always committed to passenger safety. It is our constant endeavour to enhance our products and user experience.”

While one understands the government's intent, stricter compliance with wearing the seat belt is more important, an official at another firm pointed out, adding that while seat belts and alarms can be added, it is poor compliance that defeats the whole purpose.

Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport had earlier said that there will be an additional penalty for not wearing a seat belt. The draft notification, however, doesn't include the same.

