

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2255

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to ambulance seat belt notification, air bags, and driver training.

Brief Description: Concerning ambulance seat belt notification, air bags, and driver training.

Sponsors: Representative Van De Wege.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/20/14, 1/23/14, 1/29/14, 1/30/14 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Prohibits seat belt alarms from activating until the ambulance is put in drive gear.
- States any ambulance manufactured after the effective date of this act must have air bags that meet federal regulations in the cab of the ambulance and cannot be modified, blocked, or turned off.
- Directs the Washington Fire Chiefs and the Washington State Patrol to study the need and feasibility of a regional vehicle accident prevention program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Farrell, Vice Chair; Fey, Vice Chair; Moscoso, Vice Chair; Bergquist, Fitzgibbon, Freeman, Habib, Hawkins, Hayes, Kochmar, Morris, Muri, Ryu, Sells, Takko, Tarleton and Walkinshaw.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Orcutt, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Overstreet, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Johnson, Klippert, Pike, Shea, Young and Zeiger.

Staff: Jerry Long (786-7306).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

An ambulance is a vehicle used for emergency medical care that provides a driver's compartment; a patient compartment to accommodate an emergency medical services provider and one patient located on the primary cot so positioned that the primary patient can be given intensive life-support during transit; and equipment and supplies for emergency care. Ambulances have two primary weight categories with different designs: one category is rated 10,000 to 14,000 gross vehicle weight; and the second category is 14,001 gross vehicle weight or more.

In the United States, standards for ambulance design have existed since 1976, where the recommended standards are published by the United States General Services Administration and known as KKK-1822-A. These recommended standards have been revised several times and are currently in version "F," known as KKK-1822-F. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has also published recommended design standards, NFPA 1917.

The Code of Federal Regulations Part 1, Federal Motor Safety Standard Number 208, requires that audible and visual seatbelt reminder systems be installed at the driver's seat position for passenger vehicles. Federal code requires a warning light for not less than 60 seconds and an audible warning of four to eight seconds for passenger vehicles when the vehicles ignition switch is moved to the "on" or the "start" position. Vehicle manufacturers are permitted to have reminder systems that go beyond the minimum standard.

Federal regulations require all light vehicles sold in the United States, which include cars, SUVs, vans, and pickup trucks, to have dual front airbags starting with the 1998 model year. In May 1995 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) issued a final rule for Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) Number 208, allowing manufacturers to install an on-off switch for the passenger air bag in vehicles that cannot accommodate a rear-facing child safety seat anywhere except in the front seat, like pickup trucks and cars either with no rear seat or with rear seats too small to accommodate rear-facing child safety seats. In November 1997 the NHTSA issued another final rule enabling owners of any vehicle to obtain, at their own expense, an aftermarket on-off switch for their passenger air bag if they transport people in certain high-risk groups.

Law enforcement agencies in Washington utilize driving simulators to train officers. Several states and local governments have started using simulators to train emergency vehicle drivers: New York, Michigan, Nevada, California, Connecticut, and Texas.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Seat belt alarms are prohibited from activating until the ambulance is put into drive gear. Any ambulance manufactured after the effective date of the act must comply, and current warning systems may be modified on any ambulance manufactured before the effective date of this act. Any ambulance manufactured after the effective date of this act must have air bags that meet federal regulations in the cab of the ambulance and cannot be modified, blocked, or turned off.

The Washington Fire Chiefs and the Washington State Patrol are directed to study the need and feasibility of a regional vehicle accident prevention program. The need and feasibility requirement of the study is to include driver simulators along with the availability of the simulators. A written report to the Legislature is due by December 1, 2014.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill clarifies that the affected seatbelts are the seat belts in the cab of the ambulance and not in other locations of the ambulance.

The substitute bill removes the requirement for the Washington State Patrol and the Washington Fire Chiefs to design a training program utilizing driving simulators, but instead for the two entities to study the need and feasibility of a regional vehicle accident prevention program. The need and feasibility requirement of the study is to include using driver simulators along with the availability of the simulators.

The substitute bill clarifies emergency personnel as ambulance and medic unit operators.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2014.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This complies with federal regulations for seatbelt alarms, along with the dash lights. The ability to not have them go off constantly is a convenient factor for the driver. Under federal law, manufacturers may go above what the federal law requires, but in this case it is automatically going off when not needed. This only applies to the seatbelts in the cab of the ambulance and no other location.

Airbags are required by federal law and should not be turned off in the cab of an ambulance. Some operators turn them off due to items like computer equipment being placed in the front seat, but then forget to turn the air bag back on when there is a passenger in the passenger front seat.

Using driver simulators has shown great success in training emergency operators of emergency vehicles. Fifteen percent of accidents involving emergency personnel are related to vehicle accidents.

(In support with amendment(s)) It is recommended to look at the need and feasibility of a driver training program prior to designing a program. Driver simulators are used by other states, the Criminal Justice Training Center, and the Washington State Patrol.

(Neutral) This is an opportunity for the Washington Fire Chiefs and the Washington State Patrol to partner and see what can be accomplished. There are 17,000 emergency personnel in Washington that operate emergency vehicles.

(With concerns) It needs to be clarified that the seatbelts referred to in the bill are the ones in the cab of the ambulance. Some ambulance operators place equipment or computers on the passenger seat of the cab which are heavy enough to activate the airbag. If the airbag was to inflate, it would damage or destroy the equipment.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Van De Wege, prime sponsor; and Michael White, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters.

(In support with amendment(s)) Dylan Doty, Washington Fire Chiefs.

(Neutral) Rob Huss, Washington State Patrol.

(With concerns) Bob Berschauer, Washington Ambulance Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.