

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Wheelchair Safety in Motor Vehicles

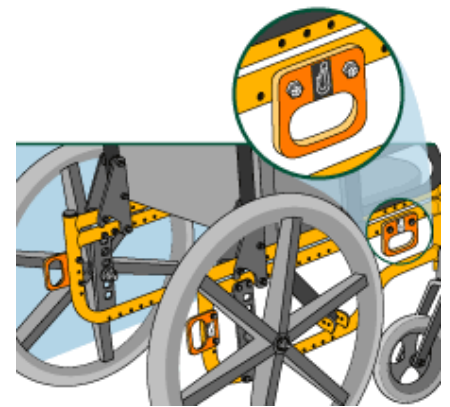
When traveling in a motor vehicle, it is generally safest for wheelchair users to transfer to a vehicle seat and use the vehicle seatbelt system or a child safety seat that complies with federal safety standards. The wheelchair should then be stored and secured in the vehicle. If transferring is not feasible, it is very important to secure the wheelchair to the vehicle facing forward and to use crash-tested seatbelts for the wheelchair-seated rider.

START WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

The Wheelchair

It is best if you have a wheelchair that has been designed and tested for use as a seat in motor vehicles, often referred to as a WC19 wheelchair or a transit wheelchair. These wheelchairs comply with ANSI/RESNA WC19, a voluntary standard developed by safety and rehabilitation experts. Wheelchairs that meet the design and performance requirements of this standard will be labeled to show that they comply with WC19.

- Most importantly, a WC19 wheelchair has four, crash-tested securement points where tiedown straps and hooks can be easily attached. These points are clearly marked with a hook symbol.
- If a WC19 wheelchair is not available, the next best choice is a wheelchair with an accessible metal frame where tiedown straps and hooks can be attached at frame junctions.



The Wheelchair Tiedown and Occupant Restraint System (WTORS)



It is important to use a complete WTORS to secure the wheelchair and provide the wheelchair occupant with a properly designed and tested seatbelt system.

Always use a WTORS that has been crash tested and labeled as complying with SAE J2249, a voluntary standard developed by safety and rehabilitation experts. The most common type of wheelchair tiedown uses four straps to secure the wheelchair to the vehicle. Although it requires someone other than the wheelchair rider to secure and release the wheelchair, this tiedown can secure a wide range of WC19 and non-WC19 wheelchairs.

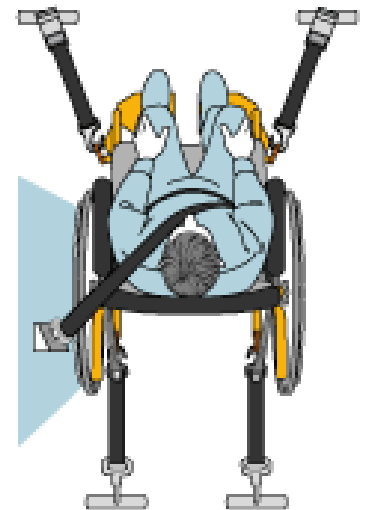
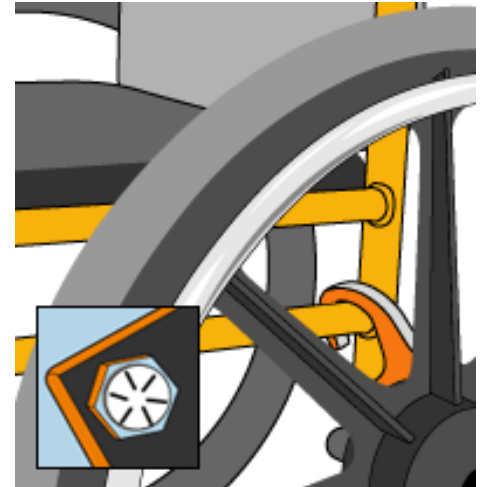
To protect the rider during a crash or sudden braking, and to minimize the likelihood of injury caused by contact with the vehicle, a seatbelt system with both pelvic and upper torso belts must be used.

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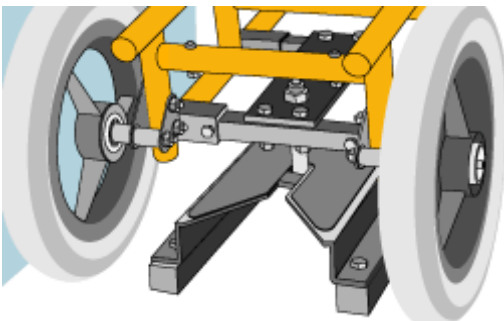
SECURE THE WHEELCHAIR

Four-Point Tiedowns

- Always position the wheelchair and rider facing forward in the vehicle.
- When securing a WC19 wheelchair, attach the four tiedown straps to the securement points provided on the wheelchair. Tighten the straps to remove all slack.
- If you do not have a WC19 wheelchair, it is best to attach the tiedown straps to welded junctions of the wheelchair frame or to other structural areas where the frame is fastened together with hardened steel bolts indicated by six raised lines or bumps on the bolt head.
- Do not attach tiedowns to adjustable, moving, or removable parts of the wheelchair such as armrests, footrests, and wheels.
- When securing non-WC19 wheelchairs, choose structural securement points as close to the seat surface as possible to provide greater wheelchair stability during travel. It is best if the rear securement points are high enough to result in angles of the rear tiedown straps between 30 and 45 degrees to the horizontal.
- If you have a non-WC19 wheelchair with a tilt seat, make sure to attach both the front and rear straps to either the seat frame or to the base frame. Mixing wheelchair securement points between the seat and base can result in the tiedown straps becoming slack if the angle of the seat changes during a crash.
- It is best if floor anchor points for rear tiedown straps are located directly behind the rear securement points on the wheelchair. If possible, the front tiedown straps should anchor to the floor at points that are spaced wider than the wheelchair to increase lateral stability during travel.



Other Methods of Wheelchair Securement



- In addition to securing wheelchairs using a four-point tiedown, wheelchairs can also be secured using a docking tiedown device. This method is primarily used in private vehicles since it requires the addition of adaptor hardware to the wheelchair frame that will engage with the docking tiedown device in the vehicle. Docking securement devices allow the wheelchair rider to secure and release the wheelchair without assistance.

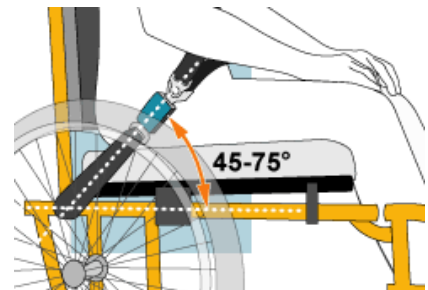
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- If you plan to secure your wheelchair with a docking tiedown device, you should check with the WTORS or wheelchair manufacturer to ensure that your wheelchair model has been successfully crash tested with their system.
- Clamp-type securement devices are not recommended since they do not provide effective wheelchair securement in frontal crash testing.

PROTECT THE WHEELCHAIR RIDER

- In addition to securing the wheelchair, it is very important to provide effective restraint for the wheelchair user with a crash-tested lap and shoulder belt or with a child restraint harness. Postural support belts attached to the wheelchair are not strong enough to withstand the forces of a crash and are usually not positioned correctly to restrain the occupant safely in a crash.

- The lap belt should be placed low across the front of the pelvis near the upper thighs, not high over the abdomen. When possible, the lap belt should be angled between 45 and 75 degrees to the horizontal when viewed from the side. Some wheelchair features, like armrests, can interfere with good belt fit. To avoid placing the lap belt over the armrest and to keep the lap belt low on the pelvis, it may be necessary to insert the belt between the armrest and the seatback, or through an opening under the armrest.



- A diagonal shoulder belt should cross the middle of the shoulder and the center of the chest and should connect to the lap belt near the hip of the wheelchair rider. The upper shoulder-belt anchor point or D-ring guide should be anchored above and behind the top of the occupant's shoulder, so that the belt is in good contact with the shoulder and chest while traveling.

- Newer WC19 wheelchairs offer the option of a crash-tested lap belt that is anchored to the wheelchair frame. If the wheelchair has an onboard crash-tested lap belt, complete the belt system by attaching the lower end of a shoulder belt to the lap belt. Crash-tested wheelchair-anchored lap belts will be labeled to indicate that they comply with ANSI/RESNA WC19.



Other Important Points

- **Read and follow all manufacturers' instructions.**
- It is best to ride with the wheelchair backrest positioned at an angle of 30 degrees or less to the vertical. If a greater recline angle is needed, the shoulder belt anchor point should be moved rearward along the vehicle sidewall, so the belt maintains contact with the rider's shoulder and chest.
- Maximize the clear space around the rider to reduce the possibility of contact with vehicle components and other passengers in a crash. Cover vehicle components that are close to the rider with dense padding.

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- Check WTORS equipment regularly and replace worn or broken components. Keep anchorage track free of dirt and debris.
- If a WTORS and wheelchair have been involved in a vehicle crash, check with the manufacturers to determine if the equipment needs to be repaired or replaced.
- If possible, remove hard trays and secure them elsewhere in the vehicle to reduce the chance of rider injury from contact with the tray. Consider the use of foam trays instead of rigid trays during transit. If it is not possible to remove a hard tray, place dense padding between the rider and the tray and make sure that the tray is securely attached to the wheelchair so it will not break loose and cause injury to other occupants in a crash.
- A properly positioned headrest can help protect the neck in a rear impact.
- If it is necessary to use a head and neck support during travel, soft neck collars are safer than stiff collars or head straps which could cause neck injury in a crash. The soft collar should not be attached to the seating system.
- Secure medical and other equipment to the wheelchair or vehicle to prevent it from breaking loose and causing injuries in a crash.

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RESOURCES

Organizations

Rehabilitation Engineering and Research Center on RESNA Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North
 Wheelchair Transportation Safety America www.rercwts.pitt.edu www.resna.org
 University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
www.umtri.umich.edu www.nhtsa.dot.gov
 University of Pittsburgh National Mobility Equipment Dealer's Association www.wheelchairnet.org
www.nmeda.org
 Society of Automotive Engineers the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists www.sae.org
www.driver-ed.org

A Helpful Publication

School Bus Transportation of Students in Wheelchairs

A manual of procedures and practices used by the Washtenaw Intermediate School District for providing effective wheelchair securement and occupant restraint.

Washtenaw Intermediate School District 734-994-8100 www.wash.k12.mi.us

Wheelchair Manufacturers (Ask for Frames and/or Seating Products that Comply with WC19)

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Convaid | www.convaid.com | 800-266-8243 |
| Freedom Designs | www.freedomdesigns.com | 800-331-8551 |
| GOVAN + wheelchair and docking system | www.smd-abitech.com | 204-975-3004 |
| Invacare | www.invacare.com | 800-333-6900 |
| Mulholland Positioning Systems | www.mulhollandinc.com | 800-543-4769 |
| Otto Bock | www.ottobock.com | 800-328-4058 |
| Permobil | www.permobil.com | 800-736-0925 |
| Pride Mobility | www.pridemobility.com | 800-800-8586 |
| Sammons Preston | www.sammonspreston.com | 800-323-5547 |
| Sunrise Medical | www.sunrisemedicalonline.com | 800-333-4000 |

Wheelchair Seating Manufacturers (Ask for Products that have been Tested to WC19)

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| Adaptive Engineering Lab Adaptive Equipment Systems | www.aelseating.com | 800-327-6080 |
| | www.aesys.com | 800-237-2370 |

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Wheelchair Tiedown and Occupant Restraint Manufacturers (Ask for Products that Comply with SAE J2249)

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| Creative Controls | www.creativecontrolsinc.com | 800-539-7237 |
| EZ-Lock | www.ezlock.net | 225-214-4620 |
| Q'Straint | www.qstraint.com | 800-987-9987 |
| SureLok | www.sure-lok.com | 866-787-3565 |
| Orthosafe | www.orthosafe.com | 609-587-9444 |

SOURCE: Information found in this factsheet was obtained from Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Wheelchair Transportation Safety, University of Michigan Health System and University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

This Tribal First Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice. For more information on this topic, please contact Tribal First Risk Control Consulting at (888) 737-4752 or riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com.