Officers give warnings about new seat belt law

State police and local law enforcement officials have begun issuing warning tickets for persons caught violating Louisiana's new seat belt law, State Police Superintendent Wiley McCormick said.

"As of July 1, it becomes our law that drivers and front seat occupants in passenger automobiles must wear their seat belts. During July, violators will be issued warning tickets, but beginning Aug. 1, violators will receive tickets carrying fines of $25," McCormick said.

Those who must wear seat belts are the driver and occupants in the front seat of a passenger automobile manufactured after 1972.

Passengers in the back seat of an automobile are not required to buckle up, but State Police recommend that they do so. Persons in trucks, buses, vans and pickups are exempt.

"We think this is a good law that has the potential for saving hundreds of lives every year. Last year, 676 people were killed in motor vehicle accidents in Louisiana. Experts say that wearing your seat belts cuts the odds by more than half that you'll be killed or injured in an accident," said McCormick.

McCormick said he has set a target of reducing the highway death rate by 100 in 1986 through enforcement of the seat belt law.

Rather than issue standard warning tickets, State Police will hand out brightly colored red, white and blue cards to violators. The cards carry a brief explanation of the seat belt law and a message regarding seat belt safety.

"We're hoping motorists will keep these cards in their automobiles to remind them and their passengers that seat belts are mandatory," said McCormick. "We think the cards will be more effective than a standard warning ticket since they explain the law in layman's terms and include a safety message."