



Artie Ojeda demonstrates the wrong way to use a seat belt and shoulder harness.



Artie Ojeda

## Seat belts save lives if properly used

SAN DIEGO, Feb. 17 - You've heard the message again and again. You've probably told your children countless times: buckle up! Seat belts save lives. But seat belts have a safety gap that could cost you dearly.

Chris Rubiani of Tucson, Arizona remembers the day two police officers delivered news of the unthinkable. "One of the officers told me: "I regret to inform you that Nicolas (his son) was killed a mile outside of Dateline, Arizona."

Nicolas was riding in a Nissan Altima that flipped seven times. Massive head injuries killed him instantly. The grief was enormous, but the Rubianis say what they learned next makes it even worse.

Nicolas did what most of us do on a long trip or when we're tired: put the seat back and relax. But there's a problem when you put the seat back. The shoulder harness is no longer in a position to protect you. The

belt is in front of you, not on you.

Accident investigator Bill Muzzy says, "The results, at least those that I look at, are devastating. Quadriplegics, deaths, amputations."

So, at what point is a safety belt no longer safe? The experts recommend that before you recline your car seat, think of a clock. A seat reclined beyond one o'clock is potentially dangerous.

The car industry says safety warnings about seat belts like the one in the owners manual of your car are enough. But those warnings are usually found in the back pages of the books with wording that some say is vague at best.

Chris and Yolanda Rubiani say they never saw the warning in the manual and so never warned Nicolas. Now, all they can hope is that others can learn from their loss. They say, "His friends will live for a long time. They'll live to be old. But Nick won't."

Some are now calling on lawmakers to write legislation similar to the seatbelt law. They want to make it against the law to ride with the seat back fully reclined.