

Update: Pope won't face charges for not buckling up

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BERLIN (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI can cross an outstanding charge of failing to use a seatbelt from his list of worries.

The southern German city of Freiburg on Wednesday (Nov. 30) threw out charges against the pontiff for riding in his popemobile without a seatbelt during a September visit.

"There will be no fine for the pope," city spokeswoman Edith Lamersdorf, told the daily Badische Zeitung. "The charges were quashed."

Although there is a requirement in Germany to wear seatbelts, even in slow-moving vehicles, city officials ruled that the law didn't apply in the pope's case because the street on which he was spotted without a seatbelt had been closed for public traffic the day of his visit.

Attorney Christian Sundermann had filed the complaint on behalf of an unnamed German resident of Dortmund. Freiburg was Benedict's last stop during his September visit to his native Germany.

The unnamed plaintiff argued that the pope was seen several times during the visit without a seat belt. The complaint offered several eyewitnesses, including the archbishop of Freiburg, the head of the German Conference of Bishops and the premier of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg.

Sundermann's office had also entered a YouTube clip of the visit, which shows Benedict touring in a German-made Mercedes-Benz popemobile as possible evidence.

If found guilty, the pope could have faced fines of between 30 and 2,500 euros (\$40 to \$3,340).

Both the attorney and the plaintiff have said the move to press charges was not an attack on the church, but rather an effort to raise awareness of the seat belt law and increase enforcement.