

Traffic Safety Facts

Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series



Number 332

August 2007

West Virginia's Impaired Driving High Visibility Enforcement Campaign

In 2002, West Virginia became one of 13 Strategic Evaluation States to make a commitment to participate in the National Impaired Driving High Visibility Enforcement Campaign, coordinated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The 13 States were chosen because of their high alcohol-related fatality rate and/or number of alcohol-related fatalities. West Virginia conducted its impaired driving campaign in accordance with the NHTSA high visibility enforcement model.

During the 2003 July 4th holiday period, West Virginia kicked off its campaign, which still continues. The campaign was evaluated for the period of 27 months, ending in September 2005. The campaign consisted of three main components: (1) enhanced periods of enforcement surrounding summer and winter holidays focusing on the use of sobriety checkpoints, (2) sustained enforcement between holidays and (3) media with an enforcement message. The enforcement component involved two crackdowns. Each crackdown was to cover 85 percent of the States' population and use sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols. Both paid and earned media supported West Virginia's DWI enforcement and delivered a strong enforcement message.

Enforcement

Sobriety checkpoints constituted a large part of the enforcement effort, but saturation patrols were the most frequent enforcement method. West Virginia held a reported total of 810 enforcement activities in the 6 targeted counties from 2003 through 2005. The total enforcement averaged 135 activities for each targeted county across the three year period reported here (approximately 7 per week during each crackdown period and 3 times per week during the remaining periods of the year). The total enforcement for non-targeted counties averaged 64 activities per county during the same two and a half year period. The State held an increasing number of sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols from 2003 through September 2005, particularly in targeted counties.

Paid Media

To support the national impaired driving campaign, Congress appropriated \$11 million for paid media in 2003. Of the total, \$500,000 was spent to develop the national advertisement, \$5.5 million was spent to purchase air time on national TV and the remainder was used to purchase media in the 13 Strategic Evaluation States (of which \$101,214 was spent in West Virginia). The media targeted young men 21 to 34 because of the age group's overrepresentation in alcohol-related crashes. In addition, West Virginia invested an additional \$363,910 on paid media from 2003 through 2005.

Evaluation

West Virginia conducted driver licensing office surveys before and after each holiday crackdown to measure public awareness. Survey data indicated that there was a statistically significant 29.7 percentage point increase from the first 2003 pre July 4th survey to the post Labor Day 2005 in the number of respondents from targeted counties who reported seeing or hearing messages about alcohol-impaired driving in West Virginia. There were also significant increases after each holiday crackdown in targeted counties. There was no significant change in non-targeted counties. Over the course of the campaign, the proportion of driver licensing office survey respondents in targeted counties recognizing the You Drink & Drive. You Lose. slogan increased by 41 percentage points.

In addition, from 2003 to 2005, immediately before and after each crackdown period, public awareness telephone surveys were administered to a statewide sample of drivers who had consumed an alcoholic beverage in the last year. Results from these surveys show that, across all three years, there was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents that saw or heard messages and special police efforts to reduce driving under the influence or driving drunk in their communities. During each crackdown, the proportion of respondents who reported seeing

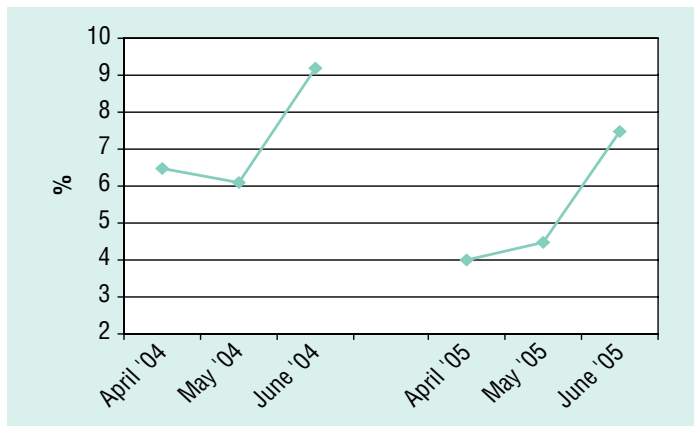
or hearing about the police setting up checkpoints or other enforcement efforts to catch impaired drivers increased.

Direct Observations of Driver BACs

West Virginia also conducted roadside surveys in targeted counties monthly from April 2004 through November 2004 and during April, May, and June of 2005 (for a total of 11 months) to measure drinking and drivers on the road. Driver blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) were collected at sobriety checkpoints in each targeted county to directly measure the effect of enforcement and publicity on drinking and driving. The research team obtained voluntary, blind, anonymous BACs from randomly selected drivers on handheld breath-testing devices. Generally, about 96 percent or more drivers agreed to the BAC test. The team collected 3,202 BAC samples from drivers during 2004 and 993 BAC samples from drivers during April, May, and June of 2005.

Overall, there was a statistically significant 2.8-percentage-point decrease in drivers with a positive BAC from April, May, and June of 2004 to the same months in 2005. The breath test refusal rates for both periods were also low.

Figure 1: West Virginia Roadside Survey: Driver BACs (2004 versus 2005)



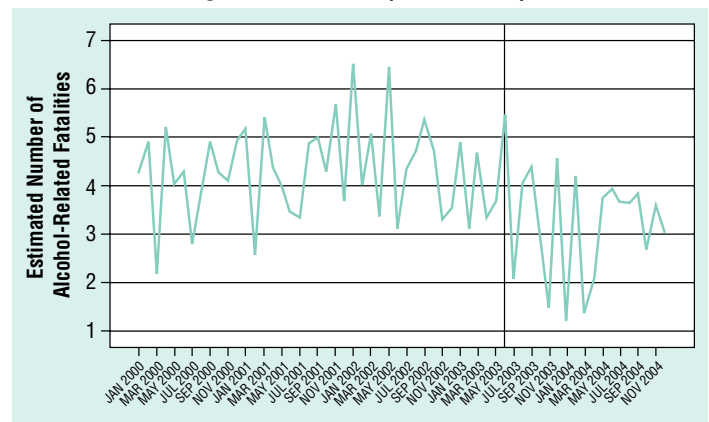
Male drivers with a positive BAC at checkpoints decreased significantly by 3.2 percentage points over the same two periods (from 8.3 percent to 5.1 percent).

Alcohol-Related Fatalities

There was a significant “sudden and sustained” decrease in the alcohol-related fatality trend for targeted counties in the 18 month period from July 2003 through December

2004 compared to the trend from January 2000 through June 2003, indicated by ARIMA modeling. ARIMA analysis also determined that the approximate reduction in the number of alcohol-related fatalities was .98 lives each month for the 18 months following the beginning of the campaign for a total estimate of about 18 lives saved in the targeted counties during this time. Analyses of the alcohol-related fatalities for men 21 to 34 years old in the targeted counties yielded a predicted reduction of .09 lives per month, but the reduction was not statistically significant. Figure 2 shows the predicted reduction in alcohol-related fatalities in targeted counties as a result of the campaign.

Figure 2: West Virginia Predicted Alcohol-Related Fatalities for Targeted Counties (2000-2004)



Summary

West Virginia’s impaired driving high visibility enforcement campaign was designed to reduce impaired driving and ultimately, alcohol-related crash fatalities. In targeted counties, West Virginia significantly reduced the alcohol-related fatality trend and the number of drivers with a positive BAC when they implemented the full NHTSA impaired driving campaign model. The reduction in alcohol-related fatalities saved an estimated 18 lives over an 18-month period in West Virginia.

How to Order

For a copy of West Virginia’s Impaired Driving High Visibility Enforcement Campaign (29 pages plus appendices) write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, send a fax to 202-366-7096, or download from www.nhtsa.dot.gov. John Siegler, Ph.D., was the contract manager.