



DOT HS 811 867

March 2014

Two Community Distracted Driving Programs Reduce Hand-Held Phone Use

NHTSA's high-visibility enforcement (HVE) model is a proven technique to change driver behavior and change it quickly, thereby enhancing the effect of traffic laws. HVE combines strong laws, vigorous highly visible law enforcement activity, targeted advertising that emphasizes the enforcement, and evaluation. NHTSA has applied the HVE model to reducing impaired driving, aggressive driving, and speeding. *Click It or Ticket*, NHTSA's best known HVE campaign, is credited with increasing the national seat belt rate to its present all-time high.

NHTSA tested whether the high-visibility enforcement model could be applied successfully to distracted driving. Unlike seat belts that are worn for an entire trip, a driver may make one or more short phone calls during a trip, increasing the difficulty of observation. Two communities in Connecticut and New York tested the HVE model over one year in four enforcement waves. Both States have strong laws banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving. Because of the intermittent nature of cell phone and texting use while driving, the extent to which law enforcement officers could devise strategies to vigorously enforce the laws and increase motorists' perception of the risk of receiving a citation was unknown.

Targeted Messaging

NHTSA's Office of Communications and Consumer Information developed television and radio commercials depicting cell phone users crashing their vehicles. The commercials used the tag line *Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other*. The closing visual depicted law enforcement activity with a voiceover "We're stepping up enforcement to save lives—talking or texting while driving is against the law." The commercials are available online at www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/CAMPAIGNS/Distracted+Driving/Phone+In+One+Hand+Ticket+In+The+Other.

Enforcement

The agencies participating were the East Hartford, Hartford, and West Hartford police departments, and the Connecticut State Police; in New York it was the Syracuse Police Department, the Onondaga Sheriff's Office, and the New York State Police. Officers issued 100 to 200 citations per 10,000 population during each of four waves in each test area, substantially higher than benchmark levels in other traffic safety areas like *Click It or Ticket*. Officers exceeded the prior year's ticketing by factors of about 60.

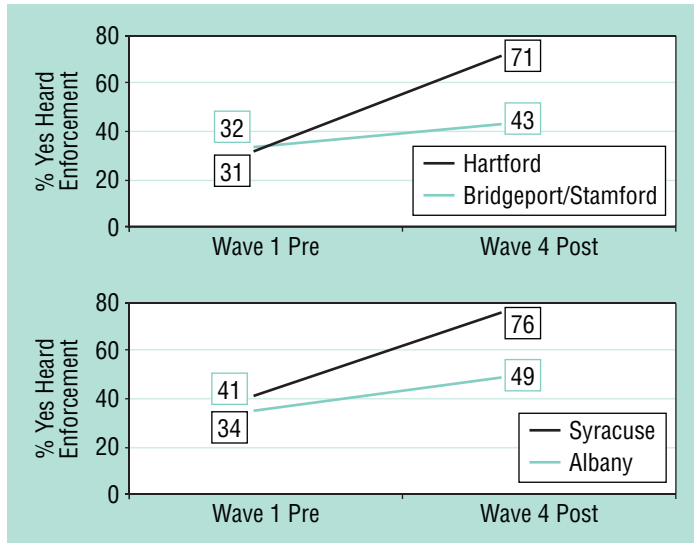


Awareness

The department of motor vehicle offices in the enforcement and comparison areas in each State collected public awareness information. Awareness of the *Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other* slogan started at 5% in both Hartford and the Connecticut control areas (Bridgeport and Stamford). Over the course of the program, recognition increased significantly to 54% in Hartford versus 12% in the control area. In Syracuse, recognition increased from 5% to 29% as compared to 4% to 5% in the control area, Albany.

The percentage of respondents in the Hartford area who heard about enhanced police enforcement increased significantly from 31% at baseline to 71% at the end of the fourth wave. There was a smaller but statistically significant increase of awareness of special police enforcement in the comparison area as well (from 32% to 43%). Similarly, in Syracuse, the number of respondents reporting that they had heard, read, or seen enforcement increased significantly (41% to 76%) with a smaller yet still significant increase in Albany (34% to 49%).

Percentage of Respondents Who Heard About Enhanced Police Enforcement



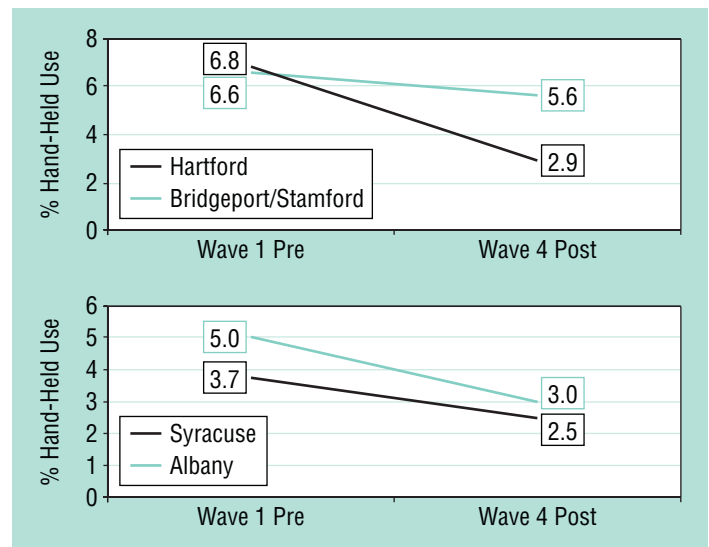
Observed Cell Phone Use

Cell phone use observations were conducted at 15 sites in each intervention area, plus 15 sites in Albany, 15 in Stamford, and 7 sites in Bridgeport (control areas). Across all cities and all waves, 135,714 drivers of passenger vehicles were observed in Connecticut, 89,826 in New York.

The percentage of drivers observed holding their phones to their ears decreased from baseline to the end of the final wave in the Hartford area (from 6.8% to 2.9%) and the Connecticut control sites (from 6.6% to 5.6%). These changes represent a statistically significant 57% drop in observed cell phone use for the Hartford site compared to a 15% drop at the control sites.

In Hartford, observed hand-held use dropped the most for drivers estimated to be 25 to 59 years old (6.8% to 3.2% phone use) and pickup truck drivers (from 9.9% to 4.0% phone use). Fewer drivers in Syracuse were observed holding cell phones to their ears at the end of the fourth wave (from 3.7% to 2.5%), and this 32% decrease was statistically significant. There was also a significant 40% reduction in observed hand-held cell phone use in Albany from 5.0% to 3.0%. The interac-

Percentage of Observed Hand-Held Phone Use



tion between location and demonstration wave was not significant, which suggests that the reductions in hand-held cell phone use were similar in both locations. In Syracuse, drivers whose use dropped the most were estimated to be 25 to 59 years old (4.0% to 2.7%) and male drivers (3.8% to 1.9%).

Hartford and Syracuse demonstrated that the high-visibility enforcement model can be applied to distracted driving using a range of enforcement techniques (stationary spotters, targeted checkpoints, and saturation patrols). Generally, with each successive enforcement and media wave, observed hand-held and manipulation of electronic devices declined. There was some variation from wave to wave, which emphasizes the need for repeated applications. Public awareness about distracted driving was high in test and control sites with test sites higher in enforcement-related messages. Both law enforcement and the public support vigorous cell phone ticketing.

Download *Evaluation of the NHTSA Distracted Driving Demonstration Project in Communities in Connecticut and New York* (47 pages), prepared by Preusser Research Group, from www.nhtsa.gov.