

North Dakota Statewide Traffic Safety Survey, 2011



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The United States lags behind many other industrial nations in its ability to ensure safety on public roadways (Figure 1). In a national initiative to improve transparency and quantify metrics for behavior-based investments designed to reduce motor vehicle crashes, the Governor’s Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) devised a set of performance measures aimed to elucidate traffic safety priorities and progress related to behavioral safety plans and programs, including 10 questions to highlight states’ progress on the following safety issues:

- Overall traffic safety performance
- Seat belt use
- Child occupants
- Alcohol-impaired driving
- Speeding and aggressive driving
- Motorcyclists
- Young drivers
- Older drivers
- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists

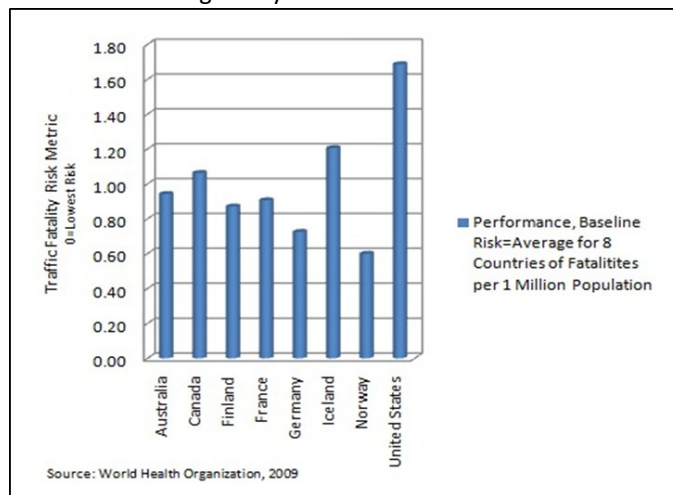


Figure 1. International Traffic Fatality Risk for Selected Countries

A mail survey included the 10 core questions and North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT)-designated questions related to education, policy, and enforcement. Based on state driver registration records, 1,433 valid driver responses were received. The North Dakota driver population was stratified by region (east/west) and geography (rural/urban). County jurisdictional boundaries were used to define both region and geography (Figure 2). In addition, oversampling was conducted for a high-risk male (HRM) target driver group of 18 to 34 year-old male drivers.

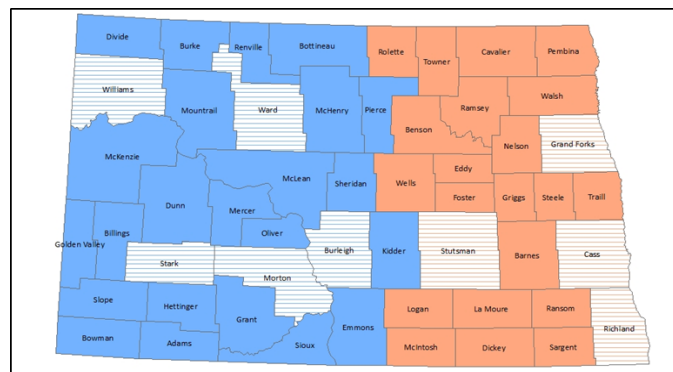


Figure 2. County Stratification

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

- Among respondents who do drink alcohol, 40.9% report that they have driven a vehicle within 2 hours of drinking during the past 2 months. Responses show 7.9% of drivers who do drink report that they drove after drinking on at least 4 occasions during the past 60 days.
- With regard to speeding behavior, 4.6% and 7.4% of drivers report high levels of speeding activity – considering those who answered “always” or “nearly always” to the questions on 30 mph and 65 mph speed zones, respectively. Drivers are more likely to speed in 30 mph zones, with only 15.2% of the drivers reporting that they “never” speed on these roads compared to 20.5% of drivers who “never” speed on the 65 mph roads (Figure 3).
- Approximately 14.7% of the driving population operate a motorcycle. Of these individuals, 41.3% said they wear a helmet and one-third regularly wear full protective gear. Responses show 13.9% of motorcyclists wear no protective gear at all.

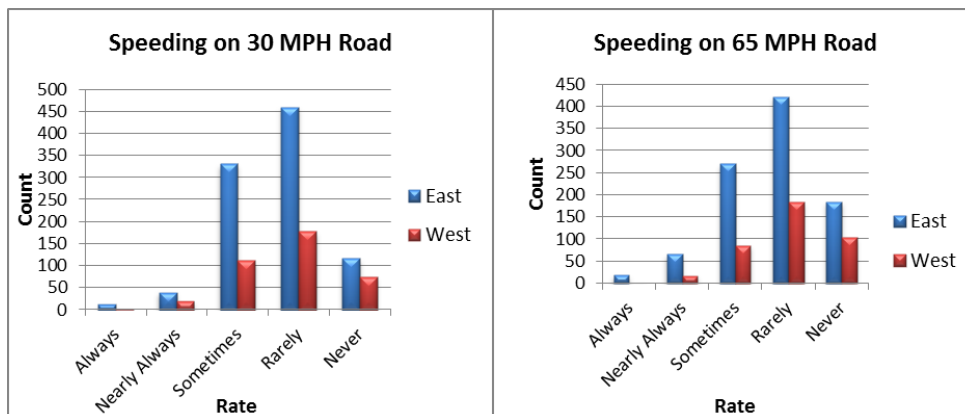


Figure 3. Speeding Tendencies on 30 and 65 MPH Roads, by Region

- The NDDOT recently released a new ad, “Wear It For Them,” emphasizing the risks posed by unbelted vehicle occupants in the event of a collision. According to the driver survey, of those who saw the commercial, 30.4% increased seat belt usage after viewing the public safety ad. See Figure 4 for specific group responses. To view ad click on link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igXQ_aOBzJc
- Rural residents drive more miles per year than urban residents and are significantly less likely to wear seat belts while operating a vehicle.
- Responses show 71% of drivers agree that strategies which increase police presence positively influence safety, as measured by their perceptions for increased seat belt use.
- Responses show drivers believe law enforcement is more likely to ticket for speeding violations than for impaired driving or seat belt violations.
- About 1 in 8 drivers multitask while driving daily via cell phone communication. The share of drivers who text daily while driving is 3.8%. Drivers are more likely to use their cell phones for talking while driving, with 20.5% of drivers confirming they do this daily. The relative impact of limiting these activities varies substantially as 61.5% say that they currently “never” text while driving, compared to only 11.5% for talking.

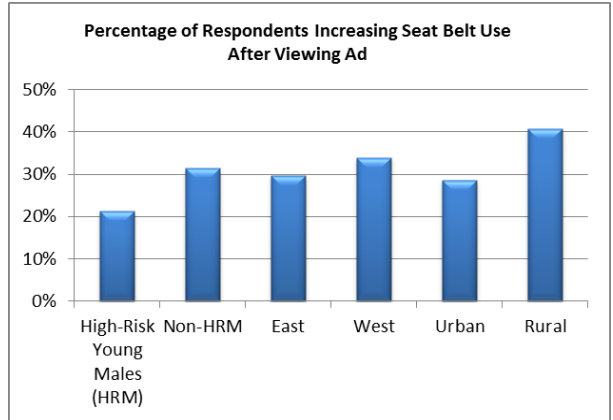


Figure 4. "Wear It Ad" Increased Seat Belt Use, by Response Group

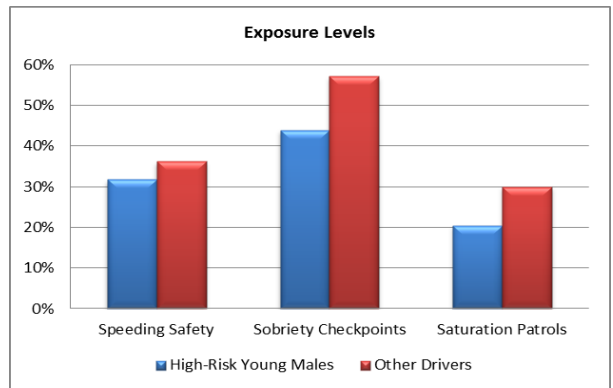


Figure 5. Exposure to Speeding Safety, Sobriety Checkpoints, and Saturation Patrols by Target Groups

Young Male Drivers

As with the 2010 survey, the selected target group of male drivers between 18 and 34 years show significantly different behaviors, exposure levels (Figure 5), and views when compared to other drivers. In terms of behavior, high-risk male drivers in this survey are more likely to exhibit behavior at-odds with traffic safety goals, such as speeding in 65 mph zones, driving impaired, texting while driving, and talking on the phone while driving.

Responses show that young males are 50.7% more likely to speed on a 65 mph road than all other groups. Among drivers who indicate they drink, the share of young males driving after drinking is 32% higher than for other drivers—at 77.5% compared to 58.5% for other drivers. In regards to distracted driving, young male drivers are much more active with cell phones while driving. Results show that only 37.9% of young males “never” text while driving. This is a substantially smaller share than for other drivers where 63.7% “never” text while driving. A third of young males talk on their cell phones while driving every day whereas just 19.3% of all other respondents indicated this daily behavior. Other drivers (12.3%) are much more likely to “never” talk on a cell phone while driving compared to their high-risk young male counterparts (2.7%).

CONCLUSION

The statewide driver traffic safety survey provides baseline metrics for the NDDOT Traffic Safety Office and others in understanding perceptions and behaviors related to focus issues. A set of core questions addresses nationally agreed upon priorities including seat belts, drinking and driving, and speeding. In addition to the core issues, questions were included to better understand views on specific programs and activities. Results indicate that many North Dakota drivers have adopted safe practices, but it is apparent that additional efforts are needed to improve safety on the state’s roads. A few substantial differences in seat belt use, speeding, and distracted driving were found in comparing drivers by region and geography. Within the entire driver population, a target driver group of young male drivers engages in relatively high-risk driving practices and has some disregard for reducing potential for crash injury through consistent seat belt use. Continual measurement of transportation safety on North Dakota’s roads provides agencies a clearer picture of what the state’s safety needs include, and assists in facilitating safer roads for everyone traveling through the state.

To read the entire research report and find references, please visit the RTSSC website: <http://www.ugpti.org/rtssc>

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The content of this report reflects the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.



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