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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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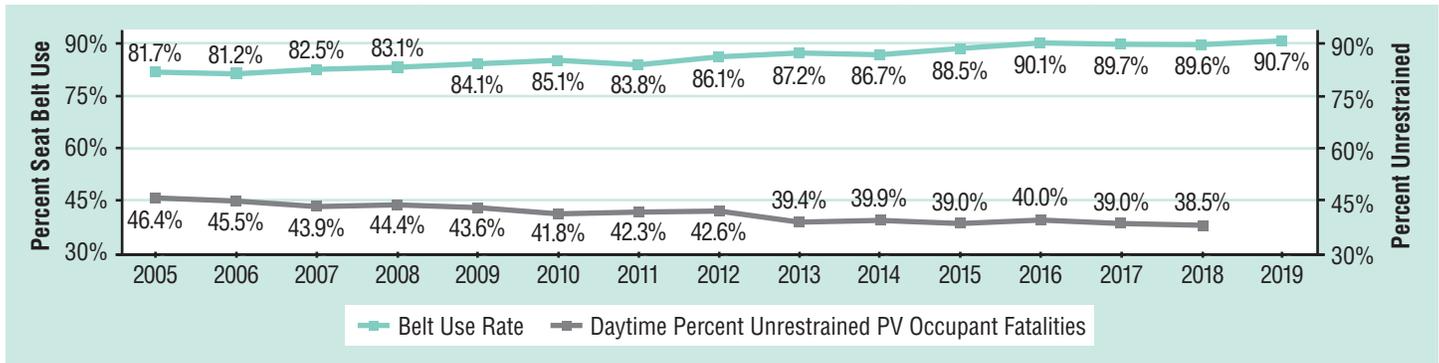
High-Visibility Enforcement and Seat Belt Use

High-Visibility Enforcement (HVE) is a traffic safety approach designed to deter unlawful behaviors and promote voluntary behavior change in accordance with traffic laws. HVE deters risky behavior by reminding motorists through communications and additional enforcement that they may be pulled over for illegal behaviors. HVE also aims to increase public awareness of the importance and benefits of traffic safety laws and their enforcement. Over the past two decades, traffic safety programs have used and evaluated HVE efforts to change many risky behaviors. The evaluations demonstrate that the national *Click It or Ticket* (CIOT) campaign as well as HVE campaigns for special populations of drivers with low seat belt use rates are effective at increasing belt use. Most special programs resulted in 2- to 14-percentage-point increases in observed front seat belt use during daytime hours. HVE, like all traffic safety enforcement, should be applied even-handedly.

Background

In 2019 the national seat belt use rate was 90.7%, based on observed daytime front seat occupants in clear weather. This number has increased substantially since 1994's overall belt use estimate of 58.0% due in part to the enactment and enforcement of seat belt laws in almost all States. In addition to these laws, States and local communities have implemented a variety of successful countermeasures to increase belt use and decrease unbelted fatalities. The most consistently effective countermeasures to increase seat belt use include State primary seat belt enforcement laws, which permit an officer to stop and issue a citation independent of other traffic violations, increased penalties for non-use, and communication and outreach supporting enforcement.

National Seat Belt Use Rate and Daytime Percentage of Unrestrained Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities



Source: NOPUS, FARS 2005-2017 Final File, FARS 2018 ARF

Short-term, high-visibility enforcement of seat belt laws using the HVE approach is another consistently effective countermeasure to increase belt use. These programs involve short-term, intense and highly visible enforcement along with media communications. Highly visible enforcement strategies can include enforcement zones, checkpoints, and saturation patrols. Communication efforts include alerting the public about enforcement efforts, as well as about the importance and benefits of seat belt use, through paid and earned media, events, and programs.

Evaluating HVE Effectiveness for Belt Use

Determining the effects of HVE on fatalities and injuries can be a challenge due to the number of factors associated with crashes. Therefore, evaluations of HVE effectiveness tend to rely on analysis of secondary outcomes such as observed and reported belt use and awareness of enforcement activities. Most observations of belt use occur during the daytime and for front seat vehicle occupants. Researchers typically compare these measures of evaluation before and after the mobilization of an HVE campaign and may compare to any changes in a control (non-HVE) site. Evaluations also examine changes in enforcement and media

efforts, which do not necessarily demonstrate HVE effectiveness, but help clarify the degree of investment or level of effort.

Examples of Outcomes in HVE Evaluations

Primary Outcomes	
Unbelted crash fatalities and injuries	
Secondary Outcomes	
Behavior	Awareness and Attitude
Observed seat belt use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of special enforcement activities Awareness of buckle up messages or slogans Awareness of seat belt law Support of seat belt law Perception of strict seat belt enforcement/risk of ticket
Process Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law enforcement efforts Media efforts (paid, earned, and social) 	

Notable HVE Belt Use Campaigns

The national CIOT campaign, mobilized annually, is the most notable model of selective traffic enforcement programs. Implementation of CIOT includes highly visible seat belt law enforcement along with the use of earned and paid media efforts that publicize the enforcement of seat belt laws. CIOT efforts are normally held in May. Visit www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov for additional information.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) assessed the effectiveness of CIOT through annual evaluations from 2003 (DOT HS 809 694, March 2004) to 2013 (DOT HS 812 238, January 2016). Researchers observed seat belt use to measure behavior change, and surveyed motorists' attitudes and knowledge of CIOT programs. These evaluations found the full implementation of CIOT to be an effective HVE strategy for increasing seat belt use. Additionally, evaluations found increases in perception of enforcement activities. Specifically, States that used more HVE advertisements produced the greatest increases in awareness of seat belt enforcement. The most recent evaluation of CIOT reported results consistent with previous evaluations, including increases in awareness of buckle up messages and enforcement. The evaluations of CIOT indicate that it is the combination of strict enforcement of laws and media efforts that increase seat belt usage.

The success of CIOT led to HVE mobilizations that focus on improving belt use in special populations of drivers. For example, *Buckle Up in Your Truck* (BUIYT) was an HVE program that focused efforts toward pickup truck drivers. NHTSA initiated several BUIYT campaigns across the country prior to mobilizations of CIOT. By itself, BUIYT was effective in increasing seat belt use among pickup drivers. Evaluations of the 2004-2007 BUIYT campaigns in NHTSA Regions 4, 6, and 7 found significant increases ranging from 2 to 14 percentage points in observed seat belt use for pickup drivers (DOT HS 811 131, June 2009). Awareness of buckle up messages toward pickup drivers also increased as did the awareness of the enforcement efforts.

Rural demonstration projects (RDPs) also use HVE strategies to increase belt use and awareness of rural seat belt messaging and law enforcement among rural drivers. For example, six States (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) implemented an RDP prior to CIOT 2005. These States paid for advertising that alerted rural residents to the increased enforcement, and three of the six States intensified their enforcement. Evaluations of the RDP showed a median 9-percentage-point increase in belt usage in rural areas in the States that increased enforcement, but only a 3-percentage-point increase in the three States that did not (DOT HS 811 084, March 2009). Additionally, the RDP in combination with CIOT that year yielded a greater effect on belt usage in rural communities than just one wave of CIOT. Three southeastern States (Georgia, Florida, and Tennessee) conducted RDPs from 2008 to 2010, finding that rural drivers in all three States reported significant increases in awareness of buckle up messages and perceived risk of being ticketed, which were highly correlated with belt use (DOT HS 812 328, September 2016). Kansas and Missouri conducted RDPs in 2009 and reported increases in awareness and belt use, which ranged from 2 to 9 percentage points (DOT HS 812 268, April 2016).



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Nighttime drivers are less likely to wear seat belts compared to daytime drivers. Despite challenges in enforcing seat belt use in low-light conditions, HVE efforts have demonstrated success in increasing nighttime belt use in several communities in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and in the States of Maryland and Washington. Communities in the three States with demonstration programs experienced a 3- to 9-percentage-point increase in belt use following all waves of HVE mobilization. The demonstrations in North Carolina and West Virginia indicated that nighttime checkpoints were more effective than saturation patrolling with illuminated roadways (DOT HS 811 189, August 2009). Maryland and Washington found success using other enforcement efforts, which included spotters and channelization (DOT HS 812 474, April 2018; DOT HS 812 395, April 2017; DOT HS 811 295, December 2010).

Teen drivers are another population of drivers for which HVE campaigns have been successful. In 2007, two States (Colorado and Nevada) implemented teen seat belt demonstration programs that produced significant increases in awareness of buckle up messages as well as a 5- to 8-percentage-point increase in observed belt use among teens (DOT HS 811 518, September 2011). Following, four States (Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas) implemented teen demonstration programs concurrent with CIOT 2009 and 2010 that used special messaging directed toward teen drivers. There was a 3- to 11-percentage-point increase in observed teen belt use across these States after the final wave of enforcement (DOT HS 812 464, July 2018).

Conclusion

Highly visible enforcement practices combined with education and awareness of the safety benefits through communication campaigns are effective in increasing seat belt use. HVE practices include earned and paid media activities, and sometimes social media, as well as law enforcement efforts. Evaluations of campaigns that use HVE strategies to increase seat belt use have shown that this approach increases awareness of enforcement activities and seat belt use in both general and special driving populations. Furthermore, the additive effect of CIOT on belt use in RDPs and BUIYT demonstrates that smaller HVE programs may benefit from being combined with larger campaigns, such as the national CIOT mobilization, to increase positive behaviors. HVE, like all traffic safety enforcement, should be applied even-handedly.

For More Information

NHTSA's Office of Behavioral Safety Research publishes *Countermeasures That Work*, a basic reference to assist State Highway Safety Offices and other highway safety professionals in selecting effective, evidence-based countermeasures. Chapter 2, "Seat Belts and Child Restraints," contains additional effective countermeasures for increasing seat belt use (DOT HS 812 478, April 2018).

All reports referenced above are available through the National Transportation Library at <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov>. Enter the DOT HS number in the "Advanced Search" tool.

NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis produces seat belt use statistics and estimates of lives saved by seat belts; the data is available at <http://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov> under the topics of "Belt Use" and "Occupant Protection."

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