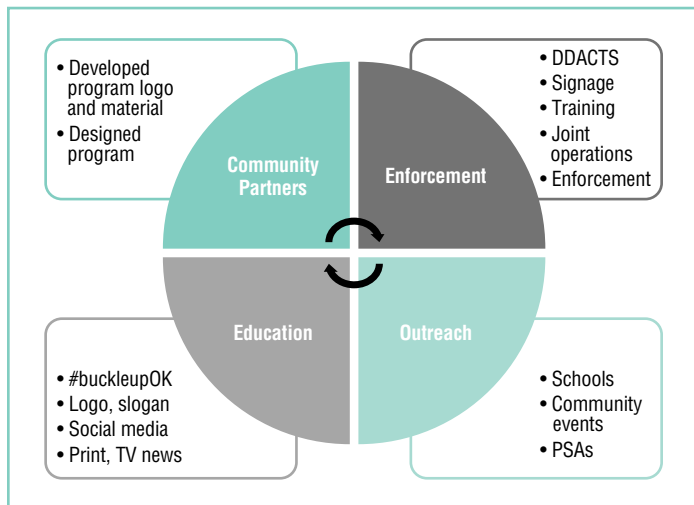




# Building Community Support for Seat Belt Enforcement: Implementation of *Buckle Up Like a Champion Today* in Norman, Oklahoma

This demonstration program used a holistic, multifaceted approach containing Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS), seat belt enforcement, community partner activity, education, and outreach to increase public support for enforcement and increase seat belt use. The Norman, Oklahoma, Police Department (NPD) and its community partners participated in planning and implementation of the *Buckle Up Like a Champion Today* program from 2016 to 2019. By focusing enforcement on high-risk areas for seat belt nonuse, law enforcement maximized reach of enforcement efforts to those who may not buckle up. The education program focused on the importance of seat belt use to save lives, emphasizing the public safety aspect of seat belt enforcement and outreach.



## Site Selection

The researchers used 2016 FARS and NOPUS data to identify States that met the criteria for lower than average seat belt use and higher than average unrestrained passenger vehicle occupant fatalities. The process involved using U.S. Census Bureau data to identify within these States municipalities with populations meeting the demonstration project criteria (75,000 to 200,000). Oklahoma was selected based on its unrestrained fatality rate of 53% (versus the national average of 48%) and seat belt use rate of 86.6% (versus 90.1% nationally). The NPD agreed to participate as the demonstration site. NPD's crash data showed

that in each year from 2012 to 2016, half of the passenger vehicle occupants who died in crashes were unrestrained. During this same time, 49% of the passenger vehicle fatalities nationwide were unbelted. Seat belt use observations conducted prior to the intervention showed a seat belt usage rate of 88.6%, lower than the national seat belt use rate at that time (90.1% in 2016).

## Buckle Up Like a Champion Today

NPD started a new process for this project incorporating unbelted crash and citation data in its DDACTS model. This seat belt focused DDACTS approach was coupled with community partner activity supporting education and outreach with the message *Buckle Up Like a Champion Today*. The community partners worked with NPD to adapt this slogan from University of Oklahoma Sooners' *Play Like a Champion Today* slogan to build on the community's positive association with the football team. The program kickoff event was held on April 16, 2018, featured representatives from NPD, Oklahoma Highway Safety Office (OHSO), NHTSA Region 6 Office, AAA Norman, State Farm, Norman School Board, and the Sooners spirit team with its mascot "Boomer."

## Law Enforcement Officer Training

NPD supervisors participated in three project-sponsored trainings: Below 100, TOPS, and a 1-day DDACTS strategic agency planning session. NHTSA worked with the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) to develop a roll-call format to orient sworn patrol officers to the DDACTS model. However, unplanned personnel changes within both the city and the NPD hindered implementation of the DDACTS roll-call training for patrol officers.

## Community Education and Outreach

The NPD public information officer (PIO) produced 500 campaign-related social media posts, 12 press releases, and eight PSA messages for the Norman public access channel. The campaign was also featured in print news stories, PSAs on local sports talk radio, and TV news spots. The NPD participated in 12 community events and various civic group meetings where it discussed seat belt use and disseminated project-related material. These events included Sooners football game days, the 3-day Norman Music Festival, the Medieval Fair at Reaves Park, 4th of July Norman Day, and the Campus Corner *Know*

*Your Limit* campaign. The project encountered implementation challenges with some school and sports related plans due to unforeseen circumstances.

## Enforcement

The NPD conducted seat belt law enforcement from May 2018 to July 2019 by modifying existing activities conducted as part of its OHSO grant. Rather than conducting *general traffic* enforcement as they did for the OHSO grant, officers focused solely on *seat belt* enforcement for this project. Through the OHSO grant, the department funded 20 to 30 hours of overtime per week for seat belt law enforcement in high-crime, high-crash areas where large proportions of occupants were unbelted and in areas with high proportions of occupant restraint citations. Enforcement was made highly visible using *Seat Belt Enforcement Zone* signs, a portable digital message board displaying the campaign slogan 24/7, and NPD campaign messaging using social media. NPD collaborated in joint operations with the Oklahoma City Metro Police, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, the Cleveland County Police, and the Purcell police department in conjunction with *Click It or Ticket* campaigns on holiday weekends. NPD often combined its seat belt enforcement campaign with its well-known impaired driving campaign, *Operation Cadence*.

## Program-Related Outcomes

During the 15-month program period, officers conducted 1,465.75 hours of project-targeted details in DDACTS zones, and made 2,167 occupant restraint contacts for a total of 1.48 occupant restraint contacts per enforcement hour. NPD wrote about the same number of seat belt citations on average per month during the program as before the program began (102.19 to 102 on average per month, respectively). However, there was a reported increase in written seat belt warnings, going from 17.53 to 37.07 warnings on average per month from before to during the program. While observed seat belt use increased from 88.6% to 90.5% during the first half of the program, the increase was not sustained by program end. An independent evaluator determined the increased seat belt use could not be attributed to the *Buckle Up Like a Champion Today* program due to a similar increase in the control site. Public intercept surveys found no effect of the program in Norman on changing attitudes and beliefs about enforcement of seat belt laws.

## Lessons Learned

There is still great value gained from the years of planning and activity completed by the NPD to take part in this initiative in the form of lessons learned and some promising practices. NPD showed that a law enforcement agency with limited resources could incorporate unbelted crash and seat belt violation data to identify DDACTS zones, as a result the traffic safety community learned new things regarding application of DDACTS.



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Administration**  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Some promising practices include:

- Providing training to patrol officers on the rationale underlying the DDACTS model;
- Providing officers with crash and observed belt use data to share the problem and emphasize the importance of occupant protection law enforcement; and
- Integrating seat belt enforcement into existing traffic enforcement, possibly through a departmental mandate.

This extensive effort also reflects lessons learned with respect to engaging community partners and executing a community-based seat belt program.

- Give community partners a specific role and allow them to assist the law enforcement agency in spreading the program message.
- As part of the messaging, provide the community with reasons to buckle up and updates showing changes in seat belt use.
- Educate the community about how seat belt enforcement helps prevent injury and death in traffic crashes and serves to deter criminal activity in their community, indicating that the main purpose of traffic enforcement is not income generation.

## Conclusions

This project demonstrated that a local police department using the DDACTS model could successfully incorporate seat belt citation and unbelted crash data to plan and conduct seat belt enforcement details. Educating people about the importance of seat belt use to save lives was at the core of the program, marked by law enforcement reporting more warnings than citations during the program period. However, circumstances prevented the program from being implemented as planned, possibly contributing to the program activity not being associated with an increase in observed seat belt use. However, the traffic safety community has gained a great deal of knowledge because of the extensive commitment made by the NPD to complete this project. We learned about applying DDACTS to a seat belt program, conducting DDACTS training, and methods for successfully engaging community partners.

Download a copy of *Building Community Support for Seat Belt Enforcement: A Demonstration Project in Norman, Oklahoma* (DOT HS 813 333) at [https://rosap.nhtl.bts.gov/view/dot/62658/dot\\_62658\\_DS1.pdf](https://rosap.nhtl.bts.gov/view/dot/62658/dot_62658_DS1.pdf).

Suggested APA format citation for this report:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2023, February). *Building community support for seat belt enforcement: implementation of Buckle Up Like a Champion Today in Norman, Oklahoma* (Traffic Tech Technology Transfer Series. Report No. DOT HS 813 334).

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