

Traffic Safety Facts

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Strategic Evaluation States Initiative—Case Studies of Alaska, Georgia, West Virginia

Impaired driving is one of the most prevalent and preventable traffic safety and public health problems facing our Nation. In 1982, there were 26,173 alcohol-related fatalities in the United States. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, along with National, State and local partners, launched a National effort to reduce the impaired driving problem. This effort led to new laws, increased enforcement, heightened media attention, and a change in public attitudes that made impaired driving no longer socially acceptable. As a result, the number of alcohol-related fatalities decreased significantly between 1982 and 1994.

By the mid 1990s, the decline in alcohol-related traffic fatalities began to stall. Beginning in 1995, there was no substantial improvement in the number of alcohol-related fatalities and the next seven years produced incremental increases. In 2002, there were over 100 more alcohol-related deaths than in 1994.

Strategic Evaluation States Initiative

In 2002, NHTSA undertook a new approach that focused strategically on reducing alcohol-related crashes and the resulting injuries and deaths by focusing financial and technical resources in States with especially high numbers or rates of alcohol-related fatalities. Working with its Regional Offices and the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NHTSA identified 13 States to participate in the Strategic Evaluation States (SES) initiative: Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia. In 2005, NHTSA invited Missouri and South Carolina to join the program, bringing the total number of participating States to 15. These 15 States accounted for more than half of the alcohol-related fatalities in the United States.

High visibility law enforcement served as the foundation for this strategy. The plan called for enhanced levels of highly visible law enforcement activities during National impaired driving crackdown periods and ongoing high visibility enforcement on a monthly basis throughout the year. Congress provided funding for enforcement and paid media activities to publicize enforcement efforts, which further increased the visibility of these efforts. From 2003 to 2005, Congress committed approximately \$9 million to

support enforcement activities and \$39 million for paid media support.

Key SES Initiative Components

States participating in the SES initiative agreed to abide by several key program components:

- *Law Enforcement Crackdowns*—States committed to participate in the National Impaired Driving Law Enforcement Crackdowns, using highly visible law enforcement operations, such as sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols.
- *Sustained Enforcement*—States also committed to conduct highly visible law enforcement operations at least monthly throughout the year.
- *Levels of Participation*—States committed to recruit participation from law enforcement agencies during each operation to cover at least 65 percent of the State's population or geographic areas of the State where at least 65 percent of the State's alcohol-related fatalities occur.
- *High Visibility*—States committed to conducting law enforcement operations in a highly visible way, such as by using signs and obtaining earned media, to increase public awareness of State and local ongoing law enforcement activities.
- *Publicity*—With financial support from Congress, NHTSA produced and purchased paid advertising conveying a law enforcement message, publicizing law enforcement activities during the crackdowns, and States committed to use the message in any advertising they obtained.
- *Planning and Coordination*—States committed to prepare and submit to NHTSA plans detailing their enforcement and communications activities during the crackdown and ongoing enforcement periods and to coordinate efforts among participating law enforcement agencies with their borders.
- *Reporting*—States committed to submit reports on the levels of activity achieved, including the number of law enforcement agencies participating, the number of checkpoints conducted, and the number of arrests made.

SES Initiative Successes

Use of these program components led to a number of successes. For example:

- Law enforcement planning and implementation allowed State and local law enforcement agencies to engage in more comprehensive, coordinated impaired driving enforcement strategies and operations.
- Paid and earned media using a common message that publicized law enforcement activities increased the public's awareness about the National impaired driving campaign.
- Improved communication and stronger working relationships among traffic safety organizations at the National, Regional, State, and local levels resulted in more effective technical assistance between the various offices. It also reduced duplication of efforts and maximized resources.
- Decreases in alcohol-related fatalities were seen in a number of States, especially when all elements of the model were being implemented fully.

SES Program Challenges

The SES program, however, presented a number of challenges as well. For example:

- It was a challenge for law enforcement to increase enforcement activity within existing resource limitations and without causing officer or agency burnout. Law enforcement agencies at State and local levels sought to overcome this challenge by using such strategies as low staffing checkpoints and multi-jurisdictional partnerships.
- SES program activities required coordination among a variety of disciplines during program development and implementation. In some cases, these disciplines had previously worked in isolation, rather than in a coordinated fashion.
- It was important that law enforcement agencies inform prosecutors, judges, and other court personnel about upcoming enhanced enforcement efforts and to involve these officials in the planning and implementation phases of the program. Otherwise, the court system would remain unprepared for increased caseloads resulting from enhanced increases in law enforcement activities.

Case Studies From the SES Initiative

Following three years of experience under the SES initiative, NHTSA developed a report that contains case studies of three States that participated in the program. The three

States—Alaska, Georgia, and West Virginia—were selected based on the strength of their plans; their use of innovative strategies to overcome some of the problems they faced; and because each of these States experienced significant declines in alcohol-related fatalities in one or more years of the program, although some of these declines were not sustained over time. These case studies do not represent a formal, scientific evaluation of the overall SES initiative nor should the approaches be viewed as “one size fits all.” Rather, the case studies illustrate how each State adopted a sustained, high visibility impaired driving enforcement strategy and tailored its approaches to respond to the needs, resources, and political environment that it faced. NHTSA hopes that the case studies will be useful as implementation guides for planning and conducting effective, sustained impaired driving enforcement efforts in other States.

Conclusions

Each State faced different challenges, used different techniques to overcome them and learned different lessons. However, four common themes surfaced in the case studies:

- Data were used and strong plans were developed to achieve high-visibility, multi-agency enforcement operations year-round on a monthly basis with a focus on areas that represented 65 percent of the alcohol fatality problem in the State;
- Charismatic leadership helped secure commitments from law enforcement agencies and provided clear guidance on the direction of the impaired driving enforcement program;
- Law enforcement training, such as in Standardized Field Sobriety Testing, was essential to help prepare law enforcement officers for the operations and to obtain their personal commitment; and
- Targeted messaging was used through earned and paid media along with extensive outreach efforts to raise public awareness of these efforts at the State and local level and increase general deterrence—or stop impaired driving before it happens.

To Request a Copy of the Report

For a copy of *Strategic Evaluation States Initiative—Case Studies of Alaska, Georgia, and West Virginia*, write to the Office of Impaired Driving and Occupant Protection, NHTSA, NTI-111, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590 or send a fax to 202-366-2766. You may download the report from www.nhtsa.dot.gov.



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