

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series



Number 379

October 2009

# Increasing Seat Belt Use Through State-Level Demonstration Projects: A Compendium of Initial Findings

This report summarizes the efforts and results from four of six State-level demonstration projects supported with cooperative agreements from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The projects were intended to increase seat belt use Statewide in low-belt-use States through innovative approaches. They are the first of a series of innovative demonstration projects funded by NHTSA. A future report will cover the results from the next series of demonstration grants.

The States covered by this report are Idaho, Kansas, Massachusetts, and North Dakota. The processes used and outcomes in each State are contained in separate case studies that are appendices to the report. The case studies describe how each specific State problem was identified, how the demonstration project relates to the State's *Click It or Ticket* (CIOT) program, the countermeasures selected for the program, the methods used to evaluate the program, and the evaluation results obtained. Each State also produced a detailed report of its activities available from the State directly.

## History of NHTSA Seat Belt Efforts

It has long been recognized that the use of seat belts can reduce injuries and fatalities resulting from crashes. The problem has been to convince Americans to use the occupant restraints that are factory-installed in vehicles or readily available for young children. NHTSA engages in an ongoing national effort to save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce the societal costs of traffic crashes by increasing occupant restraint use.

Perhaps the most recognizable NHTSA seat belt campaign is the CIOT enforcement mobilization conducted at least annually, typically for two weeks around Memorial Day. A CIOT mobilization is a Selective Traffic Enforcement Program focused on occupant protection use. The police activity is supported with intensive paid and earned publicity that focuses primarily on enforcement of occupant restraint laws.

To enhance CIOT and other NHTSA efforts, NHTSA awarded six cooperative agreements to States with secondary laws and/or low belt use. These cooperative agreements were funded by Section 403 under 23 U.S.C., which provides funds for demonstration projects (in addition to other programs) to develop new ways to reduce motor vehicle related deaths and injuries including identifying and developing model strategies to increase seat belt use.

In addition to having secondary laws or low belt use (belt use below the national average), the States receiving the funding were selected because they faced significant challenges to increasing belt use, such as low fines, political limitations, and cultural impediments. The goal of the projects funded by the agreements was to offset these often difficult circumstances and resistance from various entities in those States through the use of a variety of traditional and innovative techniques.

The four States covered by this report (Idaho, Kansas, Massachusetts, and North Dakota) shared a common goal in using the funds from their cooperative agreement to increase seat belt use Statewide. Most of the States used enforcement and focused public education as the core of their interventions. These more traditional efforts were supplemented by innovative and individualized approaches.

## State Program Summaries and Results

**Idaho:** Idaho developed innovative strategies based on feedback from its evaluation to focus on increasing belt use in the eastern part of the State where use was traditionally low. The Idaho program was designed to appeal to rural families and young males, and focused its supplemental education efforts under the demonstration project primarily on a "family values" message. In addition to the standard high-visibility enforcement and associated media activities, the demonstration project included three activities that were carried out only in the eastern part of the State—provision of a law enforcement liaison to improve the quality and quantity

of tickets written and stops made, newspaper articles that provided local statistics on serious injury and fatal crashes, and weather/road reports with family values taglines. The increase of 5.2 percentage points in seat belt use in eastern Idaho, an area previously resistant to State seat belt mobilizations, was noteworthy.

**Kansas:** Kansas used its demonstration project funding to mount a special enforcement program that tested corridor enforcement as a potentially cost-effective strategy for deployment of police resources. The aim was to increase seat belt use on selected high traffic roadways or corridors or at least to sustain the gain achieved by the statewide May mobilization. Tests of two different corridor approaches were made—the first one using a short intervention period on several corridors and the second using a longer intervention period on a single corridor. The tests suggested that short intervention periods on select corridors were not effective in increasing seat belt use, but possibly succeeded in helping Kansas maintain its four-percentage point gain from their May mobilization.

During the four-day intense enforcement effort on the single corridor, seat belt use increased on the first day. By the post-intervention measurement, seat belt use returned to the pre-intervention rate. The more aggressive intervention did produce an effect in the desired direction, but it appeared to wear off relatively quickly. Thus, this demonstration project did not produce any substantial support for the corridor enforcement approach.

**Massachusetts:** Massachusetts concentrated on extra enforcement and special localized education campaigns supported by police agencies to increase belt use above what was accomplished by the CIOT mobilization. The Massachusetts demonstration project tested three interventions: Statewide paid and earned media plus “normal” enforcement; Statewide media plus special (basically overtime) enforcement; and statewide media plus special enforcement plus localized education. Seat belt use increased statewide by 11 percentage points, but it appeared that the effects of the innovative approaches may have been enhanced by the strength of the State and national CIOT mobilizations.

**North Dakota:** North Dakota focused on increasing belt use by pickup drivers, particularly male pickup drivers—a group with notoriously low restraint use rates across the Nation. In the year prior to this project (2002), seat belt use in rural areas was 79 percent in passenger cars compared to only 54 percent in pickups. Pre-campaign evaluation research confirmed that belt use was lower for pickup truck drivers in North Dakota as well and appropriate messages for reaching the target audience were developed. Statewide, belt use by pickup drivers went from 44.4 percent to 50.8 percent and for pickup drivers and passengers combined from 44.0 percent to 50.9 percent. Thus, although belt use by occupants of pickup trucks remained lower than that for any other vehicle type, substantial gains in belt use were achieved among those on whom the campaign was focused. In particular, the goal of achieving a 50-percent use rate by pickup truck drivers was achieved.

## Conclusion

The four State demonstration projects covered in this report were four of the first six in a series of similar projects designed to examine the benefits of adding locally derived and implemented innovative methods to supplement CIOT. The findings from the four case studies strongly suggest that the basic approach is sound and assisted each of the States in boosting seat belt use. A final conclusion must, however, await the completion of the second round of demonstration projects that are nearing completion as this report is being written. If these later projects continue to show benefits such as those discussed here, it will be reasonable to finalize the conclusion that adding innovative approaches to CIOT is a productive activity.

## How to Order

To order *Increasing Seat Belt Use Through State-Level Demonstration Projects: A Compendium of Initial Findings* (48 pages), prepared by Dunlap and Associates, write to the Occupant Protection Division, NHTSA, NHTI-112, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590, fax 202-366-2766, or download from [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov). Jennifer Warren was the task order manager for this project.



U.S. Department of Transportation  
**National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., NHTI-132  
Washington, DC 20590

**TRAFFIC TECH** is a publication to disseminate information about traffic safety programs, including evaluations, innovative programs, and new publications. Feel free to copy it as you wish. If you would like to receive a copy, contact Angela H. Eichelberger, Ph.D., Editor, fax 202-366-7394, e-mail: [angela.eichelberger@dot.gov](mailto:angela.eichelberger@dot.gov).