

STATUS REPORT

INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

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New Record: 90% Belt Use

A small city in upstate New York recently achieved a singular distinction with the highest safety belt use rate ever in the United States. "Buckle Up NOW!,"

a publicity and enforcement program in Elmira cosponsored by the

Institute and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,

boosted belt use among front-seat occupants 27

points during three weeks, from 63 to

90 percent. Nationwide safety

belt use now is about

69 percent.

This belt use program isn't the first in Elmira. Earlier ones sponsored by the Institute achieved use rates of 77 percent in 1985 and 80 percent in 1986 (see *Status Report*, May 17, 1986). But these rates weren't sustained over time.

"Experience has taught us that enforcement and publicity yield impressive gains," Institute senior vice president Allan Williams points out. He adds that "some level of continued effort is required to maintain the gains."

The Elmira program was coordinated with an ongoing statewide effort, "Buckle Up New York," under way since last May. "We intend to raise safety restraint compliance in every one of the state's 62 counties, and Elmira is serving as a model for

how to get that done," Superintendent James W. McMahon of the New York State Police says.

An enforcement blitz can be implemented more easily in states like New York that have primary belt use laws, permitting police to stop motorists solely for belt law violations. Only 17 U.S. jurisdictions have such laws. Else-

where police must have some other reason to stop a vehicle before citing an occupant for failing to buckle up.

Nuts and bolts of the Elmira initiative: Chemung County Sheriff Charles Houser served as leader of the enforcement effort, and publicity was coordinated by a local communications firm. A well-publicized news conference served as the kickoff. The first checkpoint, held at the beginning of the second week, also attracted extensive media coverage. Signs displaying current belt use rates, posted at major intersections around the city, were updated



every other day for the first two weeks and daily during the third week.

Newspaper and radio ads ran throughout the three-week period. Posters appeared in public settings, and flyers were placed on windshields. Police cars featured signs reading "We Enforce Seat Belt Law."

More than 32 checkpoints were conducted during the three-week initiative. A total of 823 tickets were written, including 474 for belt violations and 10 for child restraint violations. Belt use rates climbed throughout the program, reaching 75 percent after the first week and 84 percent by the second week.

Public support: According to a survey conducted after the Elmira campaign, 90 percent of residents were aware of the program. Sixty-one percent reported going through at least one checkpoint, and 79 percent of those surveyed said they favored enforcement to encourage safety belt use.

"There's abundant evidence that enforcement and publicity work, whether on a local basis or statewide," Williams says. The Institute designed a five-year program for North Carolina that increased safety belt use rates by about 20 points during the first year. The program maintained and added to these gains with periodic three-week enforcement and publicity efforts (see *Status Report*, Feb. 15, 1997).

Now that a U.S. community has reached 90 percent, what will it take to get everyone buckled up? Williams says reaching the final 10 percent of occupants won't be easy. "With this group of people who still don't buckle up, it's obviously not a question of simply raising awareness. Stiffer legal penalties, including points on driver's licenses, may be required."



- Primary belt laws**
- Alabama
 - California
 - Connecticut
 - District of Columbia
 - Georgia
 - Hawaii
 - Indiana
 - Iowa
 - Louisiana
 - Maryland
 - Michigan
 - New Mexico
 - New York
 - North Carolina
 - Oklahoma
 - Oregon
 - Texas





Percent Safety Belt Use

Elmira, NY, September-October 1999



Canadian truckers could drive 14 hours at a stretch, under proposed new rule

Research shows the risk of crashing increases substantially if truck drivers spend more than eight hours behind the wheel. Still, a new Canadian rule governing truckers' hours of service is due in June 2000. As proposed, it would allow longer driving hours at a stretch.

Under the proposal, the previous distinction between driving and nondriving hour limits would be removed, and the overall permissible on-duty time would be reduced to 14 hours from 15 hours. However, Canadian truckers would be permitted to spend all those hours behind the wheel before taking a 10-hour break. In contrast, truckers on U.S. roads aren't allowed to drive more than 10 hours without taking an 8-hour break.

"Driving more than 8 to 10 hours has been linked to increased crash risk, even after controlling for the effects of the time of day a trucker is driving," Institute senior research analyst Elisa Braver points out. "The risk of crashing more than doubles after 9 hours behind the wheel."

The off-duty period would increase from 8 to 10 hours. Braver says this increase should be beneficial because it would allow drivers more time to sleep. However, there's no scientific evidence that more time off duty would make it safe to drive longer periods.

Braver adds that requiring longer rest periods is meaningless in the absence of a requirement for electronic onboard recorders. The current system of truckers keeping handwritten logbooks has resulted in widespread violations of driving time limits (see *Status Report*, Sept. 12, 1998; on the web at www.highwaysafety.org). In contrast, onboard recorders would prevent drivers from being on the road for excessive hours by showing when trucks are being driven.



The cap on weekly driving in Canada would be 70 hours, but the clock could be restarted after a 36-hour break — what's known as a reset provision. In comparison, U.S. truckers may not drive more than 60 hours during a 7-day period or 70 hours during 8 days, depending on whether a carrier operates 6 or 7 days a week.

The 14-day cap in Canada would be 120 hours, with a 72-hour reset. Reset provisions have the effect of permitting even

more driving. For example, a trucker could drive as many as 84 hours during 7 days. During a 2-week schedule, a trucker could drive 98 hours the first week and 64 more hours the second week.

Yet Braver says there's scientific evidence for cumulative fatigue, and 36 hours off may not remove all of its symptoms. Again, without onboard recorders there's no way to know if drivers actually have been relieved of driving for the 36 hours.



IGNITION INTERLOCKS reduce re-arrest rates of alcohol offenders

Keeping drivers with repeated alcohol offenses from continuing to drink and drive has been a long-term problem for law enforcement authorities. Ignition interlock devices that prevent drinking drivers from starting their cars may offer a solution.

In a recent Institute-sponsored study of repeat offenders, ignition interlocks reduced the risk of alcohol traffic violations by 64 percent during the first year they were required (*Status Report*, May 10, 1997; on the web at www.highwaysafety.org).

"It's encouraging that such large reductions in recidivism were found in a population with serious multiple alcohol offenses," says Kenneth Beck of the University of Maryland, the study's lead author. Now results are available for a second year of the study, during which interlocks were removed.

Ignition interlocks have been around for some time, but this study is the first to scientifically evaluate their effectiveness using random assignment methods to ensure comparability of the groups. The results are especially important given the few effective alternatives available.

Multiple alcohol offenders in Maryland who were approved by a medical board to regain their driver's licenses were randomly assigned to either ignition interlocks or standard treatment regimens. Only 2.4 percent of the 698 people assigned to use the interlocks were re-arrested for alcohol violations during the first year the devices were required. This compares with 6.7 percent of the 689 who received the standard treatment.

In the second year, when interlocks could be — and in most cases were — removed, 3.5 percent of the remaining interlock group participants and 2.6 percent of the controls were re-arrested, a difference that isn't statistically significant. During the combined two years of the study, 5.9 percent of the interlock group and 9.1 percent of the controls had been cited for at least one alcohol traffic violation, a statistically significant difference.

"An ignition interlock license restriction program is an effective means to reduce re-arrest among multiple offenders, although the positive effects were limited to the first year, when the interlock restriction was in force," Beck says. "Consideration should be given to extending the interlock requirement beyond one year."

"Effects of ignition interlock license restrictions on drivers with multiple alcohol offenses: a randomized trial in Maryland" by K.H. Beck et al. appeared in the November 1999 issue of *American Journal of Public Health*.



Repeat offenders have to blow into a device like this before starting their cars. Interlocks are an effective means to reduce re-arrest among multiple offenders.

Carriers with fatigue management programs or exemplary safety records could qualify for even longer hours. "No published research shows fatigue management can allow drivers to safely spend more hours on the road," Braver says. "As for good safety records, keep in mind that fatal crashes are relatively rare. A carrier without any serious crashes in the recent past could still be at high risk for one in the near future."



Older drivers

Percent of people 65+ who favor:



Younger drivers

Percent of 18-24 year-olds who favor:



Young and old drivers favor curbs on their own driving privileges

Initiatives aimed at reducing car crashes among the youngest and oldest drivers are favored by most Americans, including younger and older people whose own driving might be curtailed.

A national telephone survey conducted recently by the Insurance Research Council finds that new safety measures like graduated licensing for beginning drivers (See *Status Report*, Dec. 4, 1999; on the web at www.highwaysafety.org) or annual road and/or vision tests for people 70 and older are popular among Americans of all ages. Respondents favored these and other restrictions “even when their own privileges may be affected,” according to Elizabeth Sprinkel, senior vice president of the Insurance Research Council.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents said graduated licensing is an excellent or good idea, up 15 points from a 1995 survey. In addition, 87 percent of all respondents and 82 percent of those 18-24 years old favor enacting zero tolerance laws,

which penalize teenage drivers found to have ingested any alcohol.

Seventy-five percent of respondents support provisional licenses for drivers younger than 21, and two out of three favor night driving restrictions for people younger than 18. All the responses represent increases in support since 1995.

When asked about provisions affecting drivers 70 and older, 76 percent said they favor annual road tests. Annual vision tests were endorsed by 89 percent overall and 77 percent of people 65 and older. Other provisions favored by a majority — including a majority of older respondents — include training programs for older drivers, mandatory annual physicals, more left-turn signals at intersections, and bigger signs that are easier to read.

The survey consisted of telephone interviews with 1,000 men and women 18 years and older during April and May 1999. Results are contained in the Insurance Research Council’s *Public Attitude Monitor 1999*. Copies are available (\$10 each postpaid) from the Insurance Research Council, 718 Providence Rd., Malvern, PA 19355-0725. Phone 610-644-2212, ext. 7569, fax 610-640-5388.

New Spanish Video

A new videotape from the Institute, “Reduciendo su riesgo en un accidente,” explains in Spanish how to reduce the risk of injury in car crashes. The best way is to make sure everyone in the vehicle is effectively restrained. When used properly, safety belts and airbags save lives. This videotape uses crash test footage of what happens during motor vehicle crashes to show how to get the maximum benefits from restraint systems. You need to do more than just buckle up. It also matters how you buckle up and where you sit. The video helps by showing how to buckle up properly and why every occupant should sit back and away from the steering wheel and airbags. This video also demonstrates how to adjust head restraints and make sure infants and children ride restrained in the rear seats. To purchase a copy of “Reduciendo su riesgo en un accidente” (\$35) call the Institute at 703/247-1500 or order online at www.highwaysafety.org.



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