

Maple Valley High School Case Study

Seat belt use is an important factor in teen safety because 3 of every 4 unintentional deaths among ND teens results from a crash. Yet, crash statistics suggest that seat belt use is well-below the desired 100% rate. Seat belts were used by only 73% of teen drivers in injury crashes on rural Cass county roads during the past 5 years. Educating teens is important for promoting seat belt use.

In coordination with the Safe Communities Coalition of the Red River Valley a case study of seat belt education for teens was undertaken at Maple Valley High School (MVHS) in Tower City, ND. The research time line, activities, and assessment were designed around high school seat belt education events. The campaign used public service announcements, posters, observation surveys, and speakers to educate and encourage student seat belt use.

SEAT BELT OBSERVATIONS

All teenage drivers and passengers were observed entering and exiting the school parking lot. Seat belt use prior to the campaign was 67%. Seat belt use increased by 11% over the month-long campaign. Use was 77% in a survey conducted a month after the campaign ended as illustrated in the graph to the right.

Males remained significantly lower in their seat belt use rates, averaging 71% over the project compared to 81% for females. A significant difference was found in the use for teens during the morning compared to the afternoon. The morning use rate of 72% rose to 85%, while the afternoon increased from 56% to 65% after peaking mid-campaign at 76%. Truck occupants were belted only 61% of the time compared to 78% for car occupants.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

A traffic safety focus group discussion was held with 11 students from MVHS. They indicated their use of seat belts to be either *all* or *most* of the time. Safety is a major motivator. Reasons for not wearing seat belts included 'annoying', uncomfortable, and peers. Students suggested that setting a good example, incentives, and messages from peers and those with personal experiences would be most effective in moving teens toward 100% seat belt use.

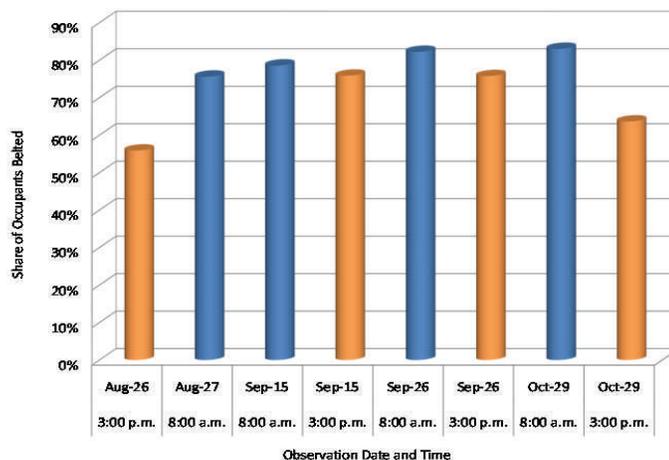
SEAT BELT SURVEY

Of the 117 students responding to the survey about their seat belt habits and their parents' seat belt use, only 25% reported a 100% family use rate. A large majority of students reported rates of between 75% and 100%. Only 12% of the students wear seat belts 50% of the time, followed by 3% with a 25% usage. No students reported never wearing seat belts. A significant positive relationship was found be-

tween teen and parent use rates. The most frequently reported reason for not wearing seat belts, at 31%, was 'forgetting to buckle,' while 18% indicated they were unnecessary on short trips. Most students supported a mandatory seat belt law, with junior high support at 94% vs. 73% for the high school.

CONCLUSION

As North Dakota works to increase teen seat belt use, it is important to understand effectiveness of interventions. The MVHS seat belt use observations show that education is an effective means to increase teen seat belt use. Parental involvement and example, enforcement and penalties, and incentives are other intervention methods suggested by students. Findings suggest benefits from future research related to parental influence and temporal factors in the seat belt use rates of rural teens.



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