

WEST FARGO SEAT BELT ENFORCEMENT UNIT

Seat Belt Observations

Seat belt use was observed in West Fargo at the following locations:

- ④ West Fargo High School at the NW entry/egress to the school parking lot
- ④ 7th Ave and 1st St E measuring traffic coming from the east
- ④ Sheyenne St and 7th Ave measuring traffic coming from the south

The observations were completed on March 6th at the initial onset of the enforcement unit activation, and then again, two months later on May 7th. Observations at the high school were done twice a day to capture arrivals and departures, and once a day at the two community locations. Large trucks (i.e. semi-trucks) and large van trucks were omitted from the vehicle count. Vehicle types consisted of four categories: car, truck, SUV, and van.

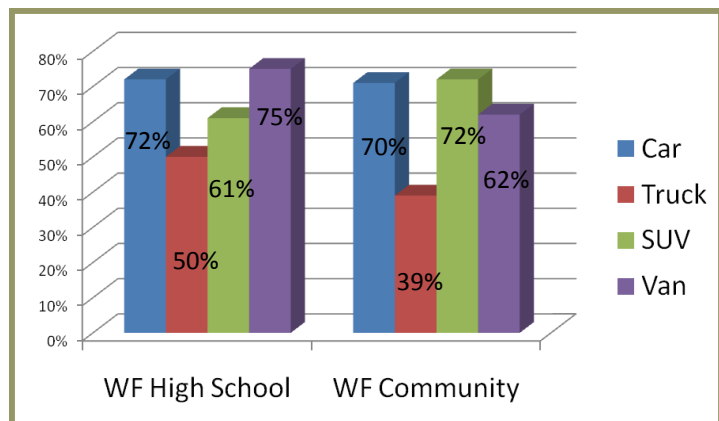
Table 1: Number of Observations by Vehicle Type

Car	530
Truck	127
SUV	116
Van	73
Total	846

Seat belt use continues to be vitally important as a low-cost measure for saving lives and reducing the severity of vehicle crashes. Communities throughout North Dakota participate in *Click It or Ticket* campaigns and high school challenges to bolster the use of seat belts. West Fargo is taking efforts one step further. On March 1st, 2009, The West Fargo Police Department instituted a new Seat Belt Enforcement Unit to encourage an increase in the proper use of vehicle safety restraints. The emphasis of the program was to influence public perception and officer philosophy with an emphasis on enforcement. Through the use of print and video media, the public was informed of the new unit. Three patrol vehicles were also marked with seat belt enforcement team identification. Additional officers were assigned to construction and school zones to watch for restraint violations.

RESULTS

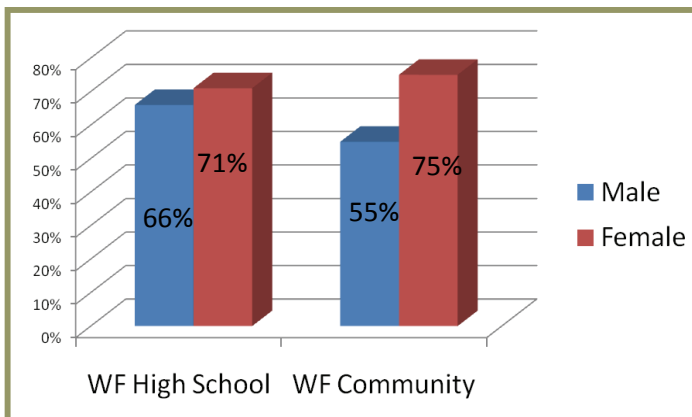
Percent of Seat Belt Use by Vehicle Type



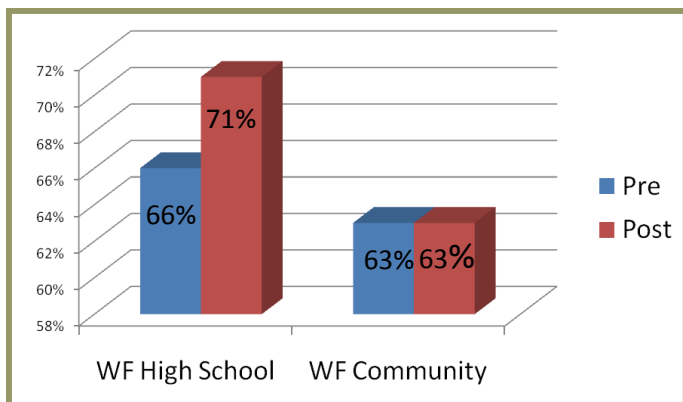
Seat Belt Use by Vehicle Type: A total of 846 seat belt observations were obtained - 421 in the West Fargo community (WFC) and 425 at West Fargo High School (WFHS). Table 1 represents the number of observations by vehicle type. Cars were the most commonly observed vehicle type (62%) while vans represented 9% of the total vehicles. Overall, drivers of cars had the highest seat belt use (71%) and trucks the lowest (42%). A comparison of seat belt use by vehicle type at WFHS and the WFC is reflected in the above graph.

Seat Belt Use by Gender: Total observations over the two dates at all locations consisted of 459 male drivers and 387 female drivers. Overall female seat belt use, 73%, surpassed male use, 60%. Male drivers at the WFHS were buckled up more frequently than in the community at large (see graph). The male/female disparity in restraint use is consistent with that found in a variety of safety restraint research.

Seat Belt Use By Gender



Pre and Post Enforcement Unit Seat Belt Use



Pre and Post Enforcement Unit Seat Belt Use : Pre and post enforcement unit observations at the WFHS revealed an increase in seat belt usage from 66% to 71%. Use of restraints was not notably different between the morning and afternoon drivers. Pre and post enforcement unit observations in the community saw no change in the use of restraints with the percentage measuring 63%.

Conclusion

Due to severe flooding issues in Spring, 2009, full mobilization of the seat belt enforcement unit campaign was restricted as officers' time and efforts were required elsewhere within the community. Even so, West Fargo drivers showed modest improvement at the aggregate level in their use of seat belts when post observations were taken. This improvement is attributable to the WFHS student population's increased use of restraints as the general community demonstrated no improvement. Throughout the spring months, the West Fargo Police Department continued to encourage seat belt use through a variety of efforts. During May Mobilization, officers handed out food and gas gift cards to drivers who were buckled up. The majority of the gift cards were distributed around the schools. The WFPD also provided three demonstrations of the rollover simulator at area schools during May and June.

Seat belts are one of the most effective means of reducing traffic related injuries and fatalities. The West Fargo Police Department anticipates a sustained effort of enforcement and visibility will foster continued improvement in seat belt use trends.



The Rural Transportation Safety and Security Center is a program of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at NDSU.

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The content of this report reflects the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration.

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