

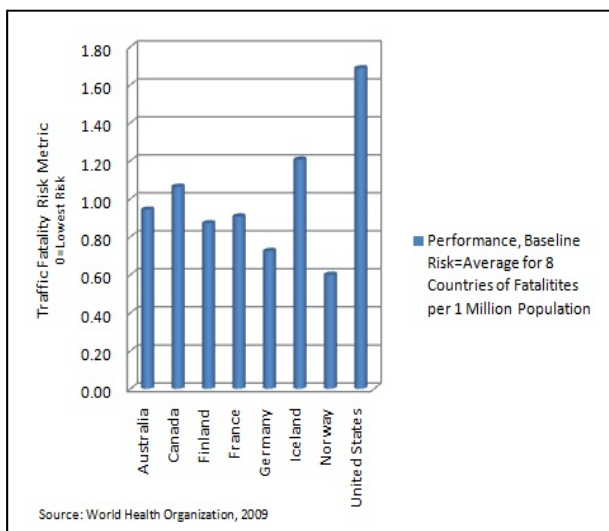
North Dakota Statewide Traffic Safety Survey, 2010



Issue brief: August 2010

The United States lags behind many other industrialized nations in its ability to ensure safety on public roadways as illustrated in Figure 1. While progress has been made in reducing traffic deaths, the continued epidemic of preventable deaths and injuries related to factors such as impaired driving and a lack of seat belt use shows that more work is needed.

Figure 1. Traffic Fatality Risk, by Country



Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute researchers, in cooperation with the NDDOT Traffic Safety Office, developed a survey to distribute to North Dakota drivers over age 18. This survey was designed to gather data in several areas of traffic safety, especially impaired driving, seat belt use, and speeding. The survey was based on Minimum Performance Measures (MPM), developed by the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which included several outcome, activity, and behavior measure-types. The MPM publication also included four areas for improvement/implementation: traffic injury outcome, driver attitude/awareness and behavior, traffic speed, and law enforcement activity.

The sampling design yielded data that could be analyzed in terms of age and region. North Dakota young male drivers (ages 18 to 35) were selected as a target group as they have been identified as a high-risk driver group. Of the 7,000 surveys sent by mail, 2,100 valid responses were received.

Results

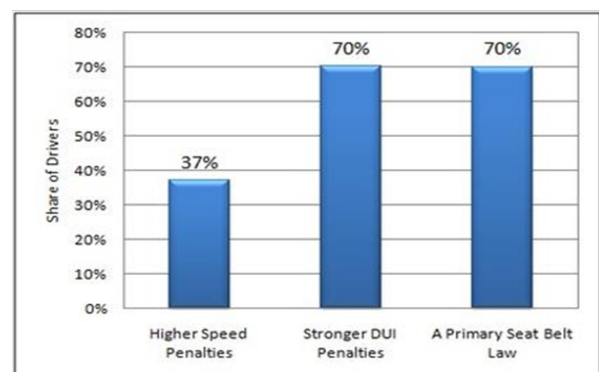
Survey results show both need and support for traffic safety efforts. The share of drivers reporting that they always use their seat belt when driving or riding in a vehicle is substantially lower than the information rate presented in the annual statewide survey of 81.5%. Driver self-reported use collected here shows that only 58% “always” wear a seat belt with another 27% indicating usage as “nearly always.”

Among respondents who drink alcohol, 44% report they have driven a vehicle within 2 hours of drinking during the past two months. More than 1 in 10 drivers report they drove after drinking at least 4 times during the past 60 days.

In terms of speed behavior, only 5% and 6% of drivers report high levels of speeding activity – considering those who answered “always” or “nearly always” to the questions on 30 mph and 65 mph speed zones, respectively. Drivers are more likely to speed on the 30 mph road, with only 17% of the drivers reporting that they “never” speed on these roads compared to 28% of drivers who “never” speed on the 70 mph roads.

Driver perceptions regarding effectiveness of current penalties in deterring these behaviors may be reflected in their views toward more stringent policies. Figure 2 shows that 70% of drivers “somewhat strongly” or “strongly” favor tougher policies as a deterrent in efforts to reduce driving under the influence (DUI). The same share of drivers support enacting a primary seat belt law. A much smaller share of drivers, 37%, support increases in speeding fines.

Figure 2: Drivers in Favor of Stronger Policies for Risk Behavior

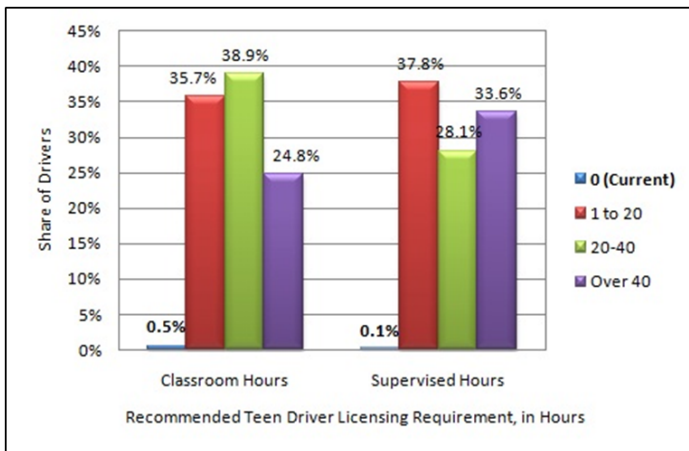


Exposure responses show that only 57% of drivers reported recent exposure to speed messages, compared to 85% and 77% for DUI and seat belt exposure, respectively. This difference may influence their perceptions on speeding as a critical risk behavior in traffic safety.

Results indicate that 1 in 10 drivers regularly multitask, which includes using mobile phones. The share of drivers who “always” or “nearly always” text while driving is 3%. Drivers are more likely to use their cell phone for talking, with 11% of drivers confirming that they do this “always” or “nearly always.” The relative impact of limiting these activities varies substantially as 67% say that they already “never” text while driving, compared to only 17% for talking.

Questions regarding one high-risk driver group—teens— show that drivers do not believe current licensing standards are adequate. Less than 1% support the current training standards for 16 year olds (Figure 3). A majority of drivers support increasing the requirements to include at least 20 hours of both classroom and supervised driving hours.

Figure 3: Driver Recommendations for Teen Licensing

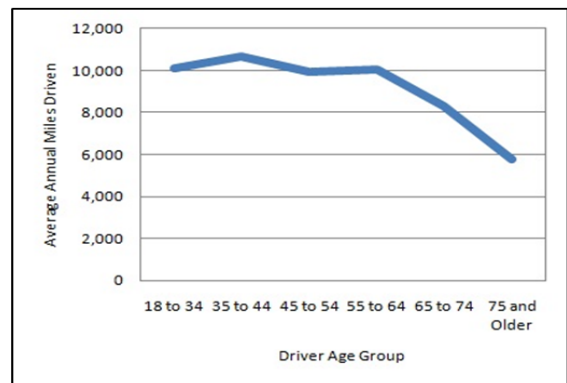


For another high-risk group—young males between 18 and 35 years— significantly different views and behaviors are found compared to other drivers. Young male drivers are:

- twice as likely to speed on 65 mph roads
- 28% more likely to drive after drinking,
- twice as likely to “rarely” or “never” wear seat belts,
- more likely to text and talk on mobile phones while driving, and
- less supportive of stricter laws and penalties.

Information on annual travel provides background for understanding the driving population in terms of travel time. The expected declining trend in driving activity with age is evident in the travel summary in Figure 4. A majority of drivers in each age group under age 65 report driving more than 10,000 miles per year. About one quarter of the drivers in each group travel more than 15,000 miles annually. Drivers between the ages of 35 to 44 years have the largest share of drivers traveling more than 10,000 miles a year at 56%. In comparison, only 38% and 12% of drivers “65 to 74” and “75 and older” respectively, report driving over 10,000 miles per year.

Figure 4. Average Annual Travel by Age Group



This survey revealed valuable data regarding a complex, multifaceted, and shared goal of increased traffic safety in North Dakota and the United States. Such data may provide necessary knowledge for developing policies and education.

To read the entire research report and find references, please visit the RTSSC website: <http://www.ugpti.org/rtssc>



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