

The United States lags behind many other industrialized nations in its ability to ensure safety on public roadways (Figure 1). In a national initiative to reduce motor vehicle crashes, the Governor’s Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) devised a set of performance measures aimed at clarifying traffic safety priorities and progress related to behavioral safety plans and programs including the following focus areas:

- Overall traffic safety performance
- Seat belt use
- Child occupants
- Alcohol-impaired driving
- Speeding and aggressive driving
- Motorcyclists
- Young drivers
- Older drivers
- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists

A mail survey included 10 core questions and North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) designated questions related to education, policy, and enforcement. Based on state driver registration records, 1,725 valid driver responses were received. The North Dakota driver population was stratified by region (east/west) and geography (rural/urban). County jurisdictional boundaries were used to define both region and geography (Figure 2). In addition, oversampling was conducted for a high-risk (HRM) target group of 18- to 34-year-old male drivers.

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

- Among respondents who drink alcohol, 29.7% report that they have driven a vehicle within two hours of drinking one or two alcoholic beverages, and a smaller proportion, 7.2%, after drinking three or more drinks.
- Speeding behavior questions reveal that 7.0% and 7.4% of drivers “always” or “nearly always” report levels of speeding activity in 30 mph and 65 mph speed zones. Drivers are more likely to speed in 30 mph zones, with only 15.2% of the drivers reporting that they “never” speed on these roads compared to 23.5% who “never” speed on the 65 mph roads (Figure 3).
- Approximately 11.1% of the driving population operate a motorcycle. Of these individuals, 26.8% said they wear a helmet and 35.4% regularly wear full protective gear. Responses show 21.6% wear no protective gear.
- Distracted driving in this study pertained to cell phone use and sudden braking/swerving due to distractions inside or

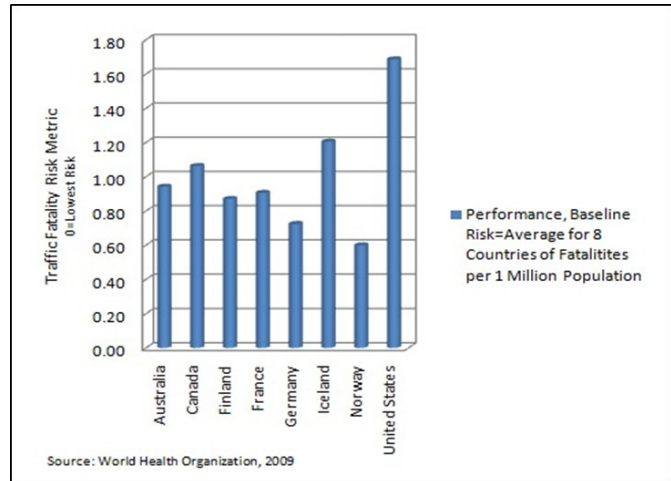


Figure 1. International Traffic Fatality Risk for Selected Countries

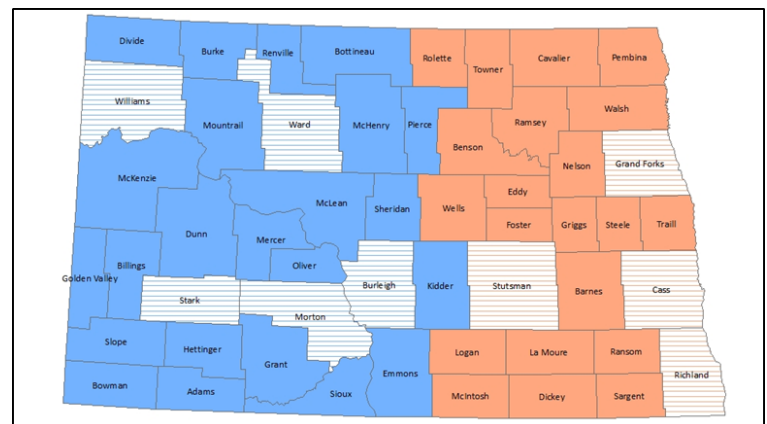


Figure 2. County Stratification

outside the vehicle, as well as due to drowsy driving. Cell phone texting and talking questions indicate that about 1 in 10 drivers engage in cell phone communication while driving daily. The share of drivers who text while driving daily is 3.1%. Drivers are more

likely to use their cell phone for talking while driving (18.5%) on a daily basis. With regard to other distractions, 4.4% of drivers said they had to suddenly brake or swerve to avoid a crash due to a distraction from inside the vehicle and a larger share, 14.4%, from outside. Only 6.2% of drivers needed to brake or swerve due to driving drowsy.

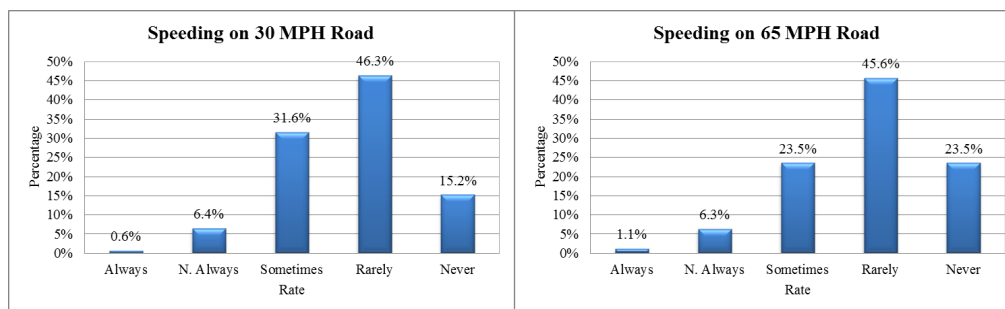


Figure 3. Speeding Tendencies on 30 and 65 MPH Roads

- The NDDOT ad, “Wear It For Them,” emphasizes the risks posed by unbelted vehicle occupants in the event of a collision. Of those respondents who saw the commercial, 27.2% increased seat belt use after viewing the public safety ad. See Figure 4 for specific group responses. To view the ad, go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igXQ_aOBzJc
- Rural residents drive more miles per year than urban residents and are significantly less likely to wear seat belts.
- Responses show 70.7% of drivers agree that strategies which increase police presence positively influence safety, as measured by their perceptions for increased seat belt use.
- Responses show drivers believe law enforcement is more likely to ticket for speeding violations than for impaired driving or seat belt violations.

YOUNG MALE DRIVERS

As with the 2010 and 2011 surveys, the selected target group of high-risk male (HRM) drivers between 18 and 34 years old show significantly different behaviors, exposure levels (Figure 5), and views when compared to all other drivers.

Responses show that HRM drivers are more likely to speed in both 30 mph and 65 mph speed zones. These drivers are also much more active with cell phones while driving. Results show that only 35.4% of HRM drivers “never” text while driving - a substantially smaller share than for other drivers (73.6%). Over one-third (36.5%) of HRM drivers talk on their cell phones every day while driving versus 14.7% of all other drivers.

Other drivers are more likely to believe that safety strategies are effective and are more likely to favor changes to existing safety standards. For example, 79.4% of other drivers believe that education and enforcement programs encourage North Dakota drivers to make safer driving decisions; a proportion more than 10% larger than HRM drivers. Similarly, 13.7% of other drivers “strongly oppose” higher fines for speeding versus roughly one-quarter (24.9%) of HRM drivers. Only 32.2% of HRM drivers “strongly favor” harsher penalties for DUI offenses compared to 40.9% of other drivers. Opposition to a primary seat belt law in North Dakota is also varied between other drivers and HRM drivers, 24.3% and 39.5% respectively responding as strongly opposed. Self-reported values revealed that 5.9% of other drivers received a speeding ticket in the last year; a proportion considerably smaller than the 13.7% of high-risk young males.

CONCLUSION

The statewide driver traffic safety survey provides the NDDOT Traffic Safety Office an understanding of perceptions and behaviors related to focus issues. A set of core questions addresses nationally agreed upon priorities including seat belts, drinking and driving, and speeding. In addition to the core issues, questions were included to better understand views on specific programs and activities in North Dakota. Results indicate that many North Dakota drivers have adopted safe practices, but it is apparent that additional efforts are needed to improve safety on the state’s roads. A few substantial differences in seat belt use, speeding, and distracted driving were found in comparing drivers by region and geography. Within the entire driver population, a target driver group of young male drivers engages in relatively high-risk driving practices and has some disregard for reducing potential for crash injury through consistent use of seat belts. Continual measurement of transportation safety on North Dakota’s roads gives agencies a clearer picture of what the state’s safety needs include and assists in facilitating safer roads for everyone traveling through the state.

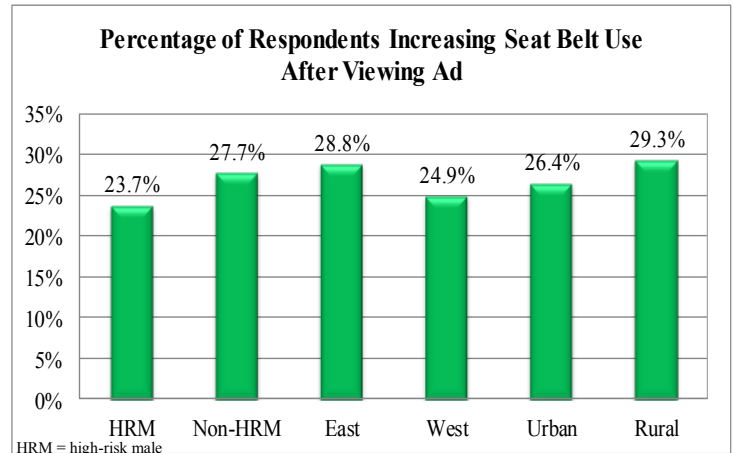


Figure 4. “Wear It Ad” Increased Seat Belt Use, by Response Group

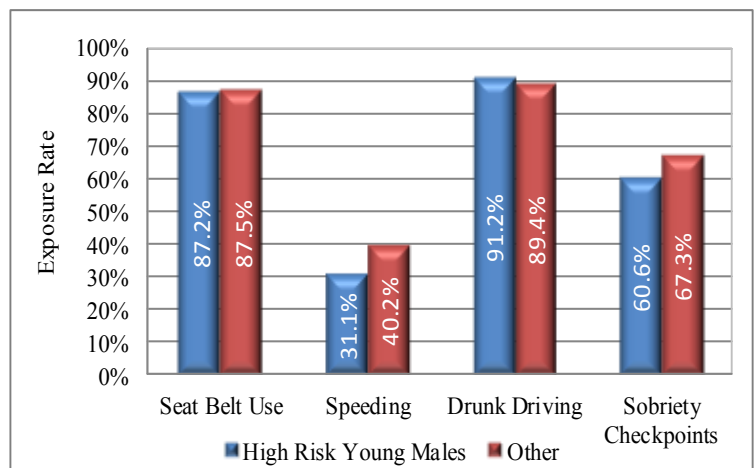


Figure 5. Exposure to Messages about Seat Belt Use, Speeding Safety, Impaired Driving, and Sobriety Checkpoints, by Target Groups

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

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