

Three Affiliated Tribes Primary Seat Belt Intervention Assessment

Tribal populations experience a greater risk for traffic injuries than other populations. Statistics from the CDC show that tribal populations in North Dakota have a substantially higher mortality rate from traffic injuries than other residents in the state for the teen to 44-year-old age group.

The Three Affiliated Tribes on the Fort Berthold Reservation in western North Dakota recently enacted a primary seat belt law to try to improve public safety on its roads. The law became effective January, 2016. An early-intervention seat belt observation survey was conducted in December, 2015 with a post-intervention observation survey scheduled for March, 2016. A second post-intervention survey was conducted in June of 2017. Ten sites were early-selected to encompass the overall area, and included two town and eight rural highway locations.

RESULTS

Direct observation survey was used to collect data in all phases. A total of 1334 vehicles were observed where seat belt use for either the driver and/or passenger could be determined. The overall driver and passenger seat belt use rate was 57.3% about a month prior to the primary seat belt law implementation, during the initial media campaign to educate the public, and 55.2% three months after the intervention. The second post-intervention survey found overall use of 51.9%.

On all roads, both driver and passenger use declined compared to the first post-intervention survey conducted the previous summer. Driver use was highest in the early-intervention phase at 54.9%, while passenger use was higher in the post-intervention phase at 68.6%.

Figures show the use on highways declined in most cases. The gender-vehicle combinations for highways did increase for the female SUV drivers compared to the previous survey but it remained below the early intervention use rate of 80%.

CONCLUSION

An assessment of a primary seat belt intervention by the Three Affiliated Tribes shows some seat belt use rates were likely positively impacted by a media campaign and heightened public awareness in the early-intervention phase. The ability to sustain seat belt use rates requires ongoing education and enforcement efforts. It appears that many gains have been eroded based on the post-intervention surveys. These gains may be more heavily related to the enforcement aspect that is not evident in the information provided for the assessment. Continuing assessment will be useful in identifying target groups and determining the most effective education and enforcement strategies to promote safety with the primary seat belt law.

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