

Occupant Protection Purpose, Strategies, and Implementation Steps

Montana Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan



MONTANA
MDT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

May 2015

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zero deaths | zero serious injuries

Occupant Protection Purpose, Strategies, and Implementation Steps

Based on the available crash data, partner input, effectiveness (including review of *Countermeasures that Work*), and consideration of feasibility, priority strategies, and action steps are defined below.

1

Support policies, education, training, programs, and activities that promote and increase seat belt and child safety seat use

Purpose

Use of a safety belt has the potential to turn a severe crash into one that results in a less severe injury or from which the passengers walk away unharmed. The key is to get people to wear seat belts every time they get in a vehicle. Virtually everyone knows that they should wear a seatbelt. The question is how to change the behavior of the more than 20 percent of the population that does not buckle up. Adoption of a primary safety belt law so law enforcement can stop drivers for that offense alone would make a significant difference in belt use rates, based on data from other states that have undergone this change. In Montana, passage of a primary safety belt law could save 20 to 30 lives each year. Increasing the penalty for a citation to \$100 or more would communicate that Montana takes nonuse of a restraint seriously. New educational materials will need to communicate effective messages that will reach the right population and can change behavior. Partnering with employers to influence their employees to wear safety belts make sense as that is a way to reach large numbers of people and employers can influence their employees, particularly regarding policies for driving on the job.

Implementation Steps

- Support enhancement and implementation of mandatory minor (under 18 years of age) occupant protection laws per best practices and GDL requirements.
- Support efforts from safety partners and stakeholders to implement a primary seatbelt law.
- Support increasing the current seat belt penalty of \$20 to be consistent with the \$100 penalty for the child passenger safety restraint law.
- Promote local jurisdictional adoption of a primary seat belt ordinance if appropriate.
- Encourage state agencies and employers to coordinate and implement workplace traffic safety policies to include seat belt use and other traffic safety measures. Develop a state Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) or similar public-private partnership focused on traffic safety.
- Research underlying beliefs and behaviors of high-risk groups to better understand them; develop and implement strategies by using the appropriate proven and innovative educational materials and outreach communication channels.
- Develop child passenger safety educational materials with updated and consistent information.
- Sustain and strengthen the National Child Passenger Safety Certification Training Program with increased focus on high-risk populations.

2

Support enforcement of existing seat belt and child passenger safety laws

Purpose

The Montana Seatbelt Use Act requires the use of seatbelts by the driver and each occupant of a vehicle. State law also requires child safety restraint systems for children under the age of 6 and weighing less than 60 pounds. However, law enforcement may issue a citation for restraint nonuse only when the driver has been stopped for another reason. Issuance of increased citations for seat belt nonuse can change behavior. To ensure proper adjudication of safety belt offenses, it is important that all parties with a role in the process be properly trained. In addition, alternative sentencing that would result in improved behavior change should be considered.

Implementation Steps

- Increase education and training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary to ensure consistent citing and adjudication of occupant protection offenses and consideration of alternative sentencing (i.e., safety education).
- Support targeted enforcement based on demonstrated crash patterns and high-risk drivers.

3

Continue to support and build collaborative partnerships to increase seat belt use

Purpose

Because young drivers and passengers have low seat belt use rates, outreach programs should be enhanced and developed to focus on changing behavior of young people. A change now has the potential to save many years of productive life ahead by avoiding severe injury in a crash. Partnering with institutions where people already have a relationship offers the potential for more efficient and effective programs.

Implementation Steps

- Develop public and private partnerships (i.e., elementary, high school, and colleges) to develop and disseminate information and educational programs regarding unsafe driving behaviors.

4

Evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing messages, campaigns, and programs in promoting and/or increasing occupant protection use

Purpose

Educational campaigns have been used in Montana for many years with the objective of increasing seat belt use. However, for the past five years belt use rates have not only stalled but decreased slightly. Montana needs to take a hard look at the messages being used to reach high-risk populations and make changes where needed to effect behavior change and get seat belt use rates to increase.

Implementation Steps

- To be determined once current campaigns have been evaluated.

Occupant Protection Implementation Partners

A wide range of safety partner agencies has been identified to support or provide leadership in implementing occupant protection strategies.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buckle Up Montana Coordinators• Child Passenger Seat instructors and technicians• Local Community and Businesses• Courts and Judges• Local School Administrators• City-County Health Departments• Local (City, County, and Tribal) Law Enforcement• Montana Department of Labor and Industry – WorkSafeMT• Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services - Injury Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Justice – Montana Highway Patrol Montana• Office of Public Instruction - Traffic Education• Montana Department of Transportation – Planning Division• Montana Department of Transportation – Motor Carrier Services• Montana Department of Transportation – State Highway Traffic Safety Section• Safe on All Roads (SOAR)• Traffic Safety Resource Partners
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Occupant Protection Objectives

Objectives for the Occupant Protection Emphasis Area are defined as follows and will be tracked annually:

- Reduction in number of unrestrained occupant fatalities.
- Reduction in number of unrestrained occupant serious injuries.