

Key Findings Report



Law Enforcement

Based on the
2020 Law Enforcement Survey
on Seat Belt Use in Iron County

Prepared for the
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Increasing Seat Belt Use in Rural Utah

Executive Summary

The Utah Department of Public Safety's Highway Safety Office (HSO) has recognized that significant disparities exist between urban and rural rates of seat belt use among citizens of Utah. The Utah Seatbelt Observational Survey revealed that seat belts are used less frequently in rural areas of Utah than the statewide average in urban areas.¹ Driving or riding in a vehicle without a seat belt is a well-recognized contributing factor to fatality, serious injury, and harm associated with car crashes.

A recent survey conducted by the Center for Health and Safety Culture (www.chsculture.org) on behalf of the HSO revealed strong positive norms regarding protective behaviors and attitudes about seat belts among law enforcement officers.² However, many officers misperceived these positive norms. For example, while most officers are wearing seat belts and enforcing seat belt laws, many officers do not believe that MOST officers are engaging in these protective behaviors. Similarly, officers significantly underestimated the use of seat belts by adults in their county.

Most officers support enforcement of Utah's seat belt laws. However, many officers did not strongly agree that they were clearly expected to enforce these laws, and many did not believe that most officers in their agency were enforcing the laws. Recommendations are made to correct misperceptions and address gaps in knowledge and a sense of support.

Background

The Center for Health and Safety Culture developed a survey to better understand the behaviors, beliefs, and enforcement practices of law enforcement officers in rural Utah regarding seat belts. The internet-based survey was conducted between June and September 2020. An email was sent to each of the law enforcement leaders of the law enforcement agencies in Iron County (municipal police departments, sheriff office, and Utah Highway Patrol Section office) by the HSO law enforcement liaison. These leaders were asked to send an email to their officers requesting their participation. Approximately 122 officers were eligible to take the survey, and 88 responded (72%). The results of this survey only represent the behaviors and beliefs of those officers in this county and cannot be generalized to officers in the state of Utah or officers in other states.

Seat Belt Use Among Officers – Actual and Perceived Norms

MOST officers in Iron County usually or always wear their seat belts.

- MOST officers, 57%, reported always wearing their seat belts when on duty (Q2).
- MOST officers, 56%, reported usually or always wearing their seat belts when off duty (Q5).
 - Officers reported they were more likely to wear their seat belts while off duty and driving many miles from home than when off duty and driving within a few miles from home (Q3).

However, the overwhelming majority of officers believe that MOST people in their agency do NOT always wear their seat belt and believe MOST adults in their county do NOT always wear their seat belts.

- Most officers, 75%, did NOT believe that most people in their agency always wear their seat belts while on duty (Q2).
- Almost all officers surveyed, 97%, did NOT believe that most adults in their county always wear their seat belt. In fact, 42% believe that most adults wear their seat belts about half the time or less (Q5).

Observational Studies Reveal Most Adults Wear Their Seat Belts

Observational studies completed in 2017, 2018 and 2019 show MOST adults are wearing their seat belts.

Table 1. Percentage of Adults Wearing Seat Belts Based on Observational Studies

	Percent Observed Using a Seat Belt		
	2017	2018	2019
Iron County	76%	80%	84%
Statewide	89%	89%	90%

(Perkins, 2019)

Most Officers Have Positive Beliefs About Wearing Seat Belts

MOST officers believe it is important to protect themselves by always wearing a seat belt.

- MOST officers, 64%, strongly agree it is important to protect themselves by always wearing a seat belt (Q6).
 - However, 60% of officers did NOT believe that most people in their agency felt this way (Q6).
 - And, 86% of officers did NOT believe that most adults in their county felt this way (Q6).

MOST officers believe they should always wear a seat belt and want people they care about to always wear a seat belt.

- MOST officers, 69%, strongly agree they should always wear a seat belt (Q8).
- MOST officers, 82%, strongly agree they wanted people they care about to always wear a seat belt (Q8).
- MOST officers, 75%, strongly agree that people who care about them want them to always wear a seat belt (Q8).

MOST officers believe seat belts enhance safety.

- MOST officers, 72%, strongly agree that people are less likely to be seriously injured or killed if they always wear their seat belt (Q7).
- MOST officers, 72%, strongly or mostly disagree that seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you (Q7).

MOST officers wear seat belts to set a good example for others.

- MOST officers, 56%, strongly or mostly agree they wear a seat belt to set a good example for their community (Q7).
- MOST officers, 85%, strongly agree they wear a seat belt to set a good example for their children (Q7).
- MOST officers, 81%, strongly agree they are comfortable wearing a seat belt even if others in the vehicle are not (Q10).

Challenges to Overcome

Many officers are not wearing their seat belts even though they report their agencies and families have policies and rules about always wearing a seat belt.

- 36% of officers who reported they did not always wear a seat belt agreed it was because they have to be able to get out of their vehicle quickly (Q10).
- 40% of officers who reported they did not always wear a seat belt agreed it was difficult to always use a seat belt because of all the equipment they are wearing (Q10).
- MOST officers, 97%, reported their agency has a policy about always wearing a seat belt (Q12).
- Most officers, 77%, strongly agreed that their supervisor expects them to always wear a seat belt (Q8).
- Most officers, 84%, strongly agreed that their leader (e.g., Chief, Sheriff, Colonel) expects them to always wear a seat belt (Q8).
- MOST officers, 88%, reported their family has a rule about always wearing a seat belt (Q11).
- However, too many officers, 24%, reported not wearing a seat belt in the past week while on duty (Q1).

Most Officers Support Seat Belt Enforcement

MOST officers believe local law enforcement should enforce Utah seat belt laws; however, they do not believe others feel the same way.

- MOST officers, 66%, strongly or mostly agree that local law enforcement should enforce Utah seat belt laws (Q9).
 - However, 34% of officers did NOT believe that MOST people in their agency felt this way (Q9).
 - And, 25% of officers did NOT believe that their supervisor felt this way (Q9).
 - And, 16% of officers did NOT believe that the highest leader in their agency felt this way (Q9).
 - And, 73% of officers did NOT believe that MOST adults in their county felt this way (Q9) even though most adults (82%) in Iron County do support enforcement.
 - Most adults (82%) in Iron County agree that local law enforcement should enforce Utah seat belt laws (Center for Health and Safety Culture, 2020).

MOST officers believe their agency supports strong enforcement of Utah seat belt laws.

- MOST officers, 80%, strongly or mostly agree that their agency supports enforcement of Utah's seat belt laws for adults (Q15).
 - However, many officers, 31%, did not agree that their supervisor has made it clear to them that they are expected to enforce Utah's seat belt laws for adults (Q15).

While MOST officers reported enforcing the law in the past 12 months when they were in a situation with a seat belt violation, there are significant opportunities for improvement.

- MOST officers, 69%, reported enforcing Utah's seat belt laws with adults more than half the time they were in a situation with an adult who was in violation (Q13).
 - However, 30% believe that MOST officers in their agency did not (13).
- MOST officers, 59%, reported usually or always enforcing Utah's seat belt laws when in a situation with a child (age 8 to 18) who was in violation (Q14).
- MOST officers, 72%, reported usually or always enforcing Utah's child restraint and booster seat laws when in a situation with a child younger than age 8 who was in violation (Q14).

Recommended Next Steps

Correct misperceptions about seat belt use in the agency and in the county.

- ✓ Seek to communicate to all officers that seat belts are expected to be used and that MOST officers and adults in the county are wearing seat belts.
- ✓ Use regular and consistent language with officers about the importance of wearing seat belts.
- ✓ Encourage officers to speak to citizens in their county about the importance of wearing seat belts.
- ✓ Encourage officers to remind citizens that wearing seat belts in the county is “the norm” – that is that most people wear seat belts.

Take steps to bolster strategies to increase seat belt use in the county.

- ✓ Seek to communicate to all officers that:
 1. Enforcement of Utah seat belt laws is expected.
 2. MOST officers are enforcing seat belt laws.
 3. Consistent enforcement of seat belt laws will increase seat belt use in the county and thereby reduce injuries and save lives.

Questions to Foster Meaningful Dialogue³

Questions to Focus Collective Attention

- What opportunities can you see that the data are revealing?
- What do we still need to learn about this issue?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than you do say about these data?

Questions to Reveal Deeper Insights

- What has had real meaning for you from what you’ve seen in the data?
- What surprised you? What challenged you? What encouraged you?
- What needs clarification?
- What’s been your major learning, insight, or discovery so far from these data?

Questions to Create Forward Movement

- What’s possible here?
- What will it take to create change?
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?

Adapted from Brown, Isaacs, and Community, 2005

References

1. Perkins, MPH, Ron. (2019). *Utah observational surveys on seat belt use*
2. Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Utah law enforcement survey of on seat belt use in Iron County*. Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana. (N=35)
3. Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & Community, W.C. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter (1st ed.)*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.