

TOGETHER FOR LIFE

Law Enforcement Toolkit

for Community Coordinators

A pilot project to increase seat belt
use in Utah's rural communities



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Law Enforcement

Law enforcement plays a critical role in influencing seat belt use behaviors. Law enforcement officers are leaders and we need their help to improve the health and safety of our rural communities. The Together for Life Project “tools” developed for the Law Enforcement Toolkit are designed to guide conversations and promote engagement on wearing a seat belt.

The Together for Life Law Enforcement tools were developed to help community coordinators cultivate conditions to reduce harm associated with not wearing a seat belt and grow protection through targeted strategies for this level of the social ecology. The specific tools for law enforcement focus on three specific actions:

- Increase seat belt use among law enforcement.
- Promote consistent enforcement of seat belt laws.
- Increase public education about seat belt use.

The actions within the Law Enforcement Toolkit are based on research in the field of traffic safety. Using traffic safety research and current survey results in Utah, community coordinators are in a position to effectively guide conversations, close misperceptions, and grow protection.

Increase Seat Belt Use Among Law Enforcement

Every day, officers serve and protect citizens by responding quickly to situations that require solid judgment and skill. Not wearing a seat belt is a decision that officers sometimes make. Rationales for not buckling up include officers thinking that a seat belt will hinder their ability to exit the vehicle or to draw their weapon quickly in a situation.¹ Unfortunately, this decision can be costly. Between 2009 and 2018, 350 law enforcement officers were killed as a result of automobile crashes.² In 2018 alone, 31 law enforcement officers were killed in automobile crashes.³

Survey results from the Center for Health and Safety Culture Survey of Utah Law Enforcement Officers revealed strong and positive norms about wearing seat belts among officers. However, the results also highlighted misperceptions.

Increasing seat belt use among law enforcement is an important focus in the Together for Life Project. Growing the protective norm about always wearing a seat belt can reduce risk, guide conversations, and promote engagement on wearing a seat belt.

Promote Consistent Enforcement of Seat Belt Laws

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has been a key leader in promoting various strategies known to increase seat belt use. Law enforcement has a significant role in this effort. Three specific strategies have been shown in the research to be effective:

- primary seat belt laws;
- visible enforcement; and
- public education/communication.^{4,5}

Primary seat belt laws make it possible for law enforcement officers to issue a citation if they see a driver or passenger not wearing a seat belt.⁴ Primary seat belt laws allow officers to handle seat belt violations similar to how they would treat other traffic violations such as speeding or running a red light. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “States with primary safety belt laws have higher belt use rates and lower fatality rates.”⁴ The perceived significance of wearing a seat belt is heightened and sends the message that seat belts are important.⁶

Secondary seat belt laws allow officers to issue a ticket for not wearing a seat belt only if there is another traffic violation.⁷ Utah currently has enacted a primary seat belt law and the maximum fine for a second offense is forty-five dollars.⁷ Although seat belt laws are helpful and important, it is not the only strategy needed.

Research suggests that after seat belt laws are passed, seat belt use increases, but those increases are not sustained and decline without high-visibility

enforcement.⁴ The research clearly indicates that high-visibility enforcement is the most effective strategy for getting people to wear their seat belts.⁵ At the local, state, and national level, high-visibility enforcement has been successful.⁸

The goal of high-visibility enforcement is to deter people from deciding not to wear a seat belt and to promote buckling up.⁶ Further, Van Houten et al. stated when drivers believe there is a greater risk of being pulled over by the police, their compliance with traffic laws will increase.⁹ Typical high-visibility enforcement methods consist of “short (typically lasting for two weeks), intense, highly publicized periods of increased belt law enforcement.”⁵ Click It or Ticket is one of NHTSA’s high-visibility enforcement campaigns.

Increase Public Education About Seat Belt Use

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that a third essential strategy found to be effective in the research for increasing and maintaining seat belt use is communication and outreach.⁵ Law enforcement officers are in a position to advocate for seat belt use in the general public. Law enforcement leaders have a powerful voice in the community and therefore can be effective public educators.

Conclusion

Utah residents have unifying values, behaviors, and attitudes about seat belt use, and by building on the strengths and resources that already exist, the tools of the Together for Life Project can increase seat belt use in rural communities. Effective prevention requires accounting for the various social contexts and interrelated relationships that influence a particular behavior in order to effectively and strategically influence change.

The key actions of the Together for Life Project for Law Enforcement align with best practices from research about increasing seat belt use. With specific and targeted strategies, community coordinators can grow protection and reduce harm associated with not wearing a seat belt.

Tools

1. Statistical Report

Complete Utah Law Enforcement Survey on Seat Belt Use.

2. Key Findings Report

An overview of the beliefs and attitudes of law enforcement based on the Utah Law Enforcement Survey on Seat Belt Use.

3. Activity Decision Making Worksheet

A worksheet designed to examine the impact of an activity to increase protective behaviors of law enforcement.

4. Law Enforcement Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to promote three key actions among law enforcement agencies: increasing seat belt use among officers, promote consistent enforcement of seat belt laws, and increase advocacy for seat belt use.

5. Speaking Points

Important information to engage law enforcement in meaningful conversations.

6. Press Release

Sample press release.

8. Print Media

Pieces suitable for posters.

References

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