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Expanding the Seat Belt Program Strategies Toolbox: A Starter Kit for Trying New Program Ideas

Starter Kit Resource

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has just released a new resource for developing seat belt programs in the traffic safety community—*Expanding the Seat Belt Program Toolbox: A Starter Kit for Trying New Program Ideas*.

Researchers examined strategies of behavior change proven effective in education, healthcare, advertising, and marketing, and considered application of these approaches to increase seat belt use. The result is this starter kit containing ideas of varying levels of readiness for occupant protection programmers to take and build from to enrich seat belt programming across the country. The 5 highlighted strategies selected among the 27 possibilities include High School Service-Learning Programs, Hospital Discharge Programs, Targeted Online Advertising, Online Learning/e-Learning, and Product/Message Placement.

Five chapters explore these strategies. Each chapter begins with a subject matter expert's historical account of the strategy and their description of how the strategy has worked in fields such as education and healthcare. The main feature of each chapter is the starter kit for pursuing use of the strategy to increase seat belt use. Researchers gathered guidance from the theoretical and practical foundations of each strategy and constructed resources to help program developers make informed decisions about the potential of each strategy in their seat belt programs. The strategies vary by readiness, as some require pilot testing, and others are much closer to implementation. This resource helps program developers take the first steps to pursue different ideas to expand their seat belt program toolboxes.

What We Did

This research began with a literature review about health promotion and behavioral change. The literature review identified fields outside traffic safety that housed effective strategies for changing behavior. Researchers looked to the specific strategies employed in the other fields and generated 27 strategies with potential for increasing seat belt use. Researchers used a two-step process to refine the 27 strategies down to the 5 with the greatest and most realistic potential for seat belt programs. First, researchers collected additional information on 13 strategies considered most applicable to estimate their transferability to seat belt programs. They built detailed descriptions

of the 13 strategies containing details on the target audiences, possible implementation methods, judgments on likely effectiveness, cost, and time to develop. Researchers then reviewed the 13 detailed descriptions to select the 5 considered to have the greatest and most realistic potential for seat belt programs. Finally, researchers conducted a focused literature review on the 5 selected strategies and recruited subject matter experts (SMEs) to draft detailed strategy descriptions.

The decision-making process used to select the 5 strategies gave more weight to strategies closer to being ready for implementation. While some of the far-reaching "out-of-the-box" ideas had theoretical potential and interest, the team also wanted to produce a list of ideas that were closer to application and more feasible to pursue by the traffic safety community. For example, research has found a link between high school service-learning programs and increased seat belt use. However, this strategy has not been widely used, and the ability to develop and disseminate the strategy nationwide remains unknown. Other strategies such as targeted online advertising have little or no application to occupant protection but are promising approaches based on their successes in analogous domains.

How to Use This Resource

The strategies discussed in this resource do not have existing evidence at the level of the countermeasures presented in NHTSA's *Countermeasures That Work*.¹ This resource is a launching point for further exploration of the various strategies. Each strategy has proven effective in domains other than occupant protection, but the evidence of effectiveness specifically for occupant protection varies by strategy. Most of the strategies require some further development to fully transfer the approaches to occupant protection, but each appears worthy of pilot testing.

States, local jurisdictions, and other safety organizations are encouraged to explore and further develop these promising

¹ Goodwin, A., Thomas, L., Kirley, B., Hall, W., O'Brien, N., & Hill, K. (2015, November). *Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasure guide for State highway safety offices*, Eighth edition. (Report No. DOT HS 812 202). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/812202-CountermeasuresThatWork8th.pdf

strategies as part of their innovative highway safety program activities. Several successful small-scale tests could provide strong evidence of a strategy's effectiveness in the occupant protection domain. Pilot efforts could help guide future development of these strategies to refine and maximize their potential for changing seat belt use behavior.

End-users of this resource are encouraged to develop and adapt each strategy as appropriate. Users could pilot these strategies either independently or in combination. For example, users could pilot a program using both hospital discharge and online learning components. In addition, users could pilot these strategies in combination with preexisting strategies. For example, users could pilot targeted online advertising in combination with high-visibility enforcement. Sharing the outcome of these activities with NHTSA, whether or not they are successful, will help NHTSA guide future development of program strategies aimed at increasing seat belt use in the United States.

Strategies

The following contains a short description of the 5 strategies including potential effectiveness and next steps:

1. **High School Service-Learning Programs** employ an educational strategy focused on seat belt use that involves young people in meaningful service to their communities while also engaging them in study and reflection related to their service. Studies provide evidence that supports the potential effectiveness of service-learning programs when applied to seat belts. The documented successes of the strategy to promote high school seat belt use suggest that little additional detailed development effort is needed. The strategy, therefore, simply needs expansion to other locales to gain additional experience that could improve effectiveness.
2. **Hospital Discharge Programs** use hospital discharge instructions supported by electronic health records and discharge specialists to convey personalized information on seat belts to crash victims, the general patient population, and to patients whose medical condition precludes the conventional use of seat belts. The effectiveness of using computerized hospital discharge instructions for improving adult occupant protection is unknown, but evidence from other domains suggests a properly executed approach is likely to have a positive impact. While the components to deliver the program are already in place at most hospitals, key players in the health care system need to be brought onboard and program material and non-user profiles developed.
3. **Targeted Online Advertising** delivers timely Internet-based messages on seat belt use directly to people with high likelihood of being nonusers and part-time users of seat belts

based on their demographics, online search behaviors/topics, or Internet browsing history. This strategy includes two components: targeted and retargeted advertising and targeted social media advertising. Research in other domains suggests that good targeting increases exposure to safety messages. Both components are ready for use, but successful application will require the availability of accurate profiles of part-time and nonusers. In addition to these profiles, it will be vital to determine what will motivate people to wear seat belts.

4. **Online Learning/e-Learning** uses online courses to inform and motivate use of seat belts by drivers who are likely not to wear seat belts based on prior research or those who have received citations. Numerous studies show the positive impact of e-learning in a variety of domains, but relatively little research has examined e-learning as it relates to occupant protection. Similarly, a course that makes use of advanced simulation and gaming technologies could be effective based on numerous studies that show the powerful impact games can have on learning in other domains, but this would need to be tested.
5. **Product/Message Placement** involves convincing entertainment media producers, directors, and other appropriate personnel to portray and promote proper occupant restraint use whenever possible in movies, television, and other entertainment media. Evidence from other domains suggests that viewers attend to the embedded actions and messages and that these messages affect behaviors. While it is unknown whether more seat belt product placement will translate into increased seat belt use by the viewing public, there is little chance that this low cost approach would be counterproductive.

Next Steps

The resource is available at NHTSA.gov. NHTSA is eager to hear from you about your interests and experiences with pilot testing these strategies.

How to Order

Download a copy of "Expanding the Seat Belt Program Strategies Toolbox: A Starter Kit for Trying New Program Ideas" (66 pages) from NHTSA.gov. Mary T. Byrd was the NHTSA Project Manager.

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