



Seat Belt Use, Especially Among Low-Use Drivers, Increases as Florida Upgrades to Primary Seat Belt Enforcement

As a secondary seat belt law State, Florida had worked for many years to encourage more drivers to wear their seat belts by participating in annual *Click It or Ticket* (CIOT) mobilizations, and by conducting special programs in rural areas of the State. When Florida upgraded its seat belt law to primary enforcement on June 30, 2009, there was an excellent opportunity to evaluate the impact of the law change in the context of the annual CIOT high-visibility enforcement (HVE) mobilization that concluded one month before. Additionally, detailed driver data were available from 36 northern counties that were part of a Rural Demonstration Program (RDP) to increase seat belt use.

Overall, observed belt use increased 7.3 percentage points from April to July 2009, 3 points immediately after CIOT plus another 4.3 points after the primary law went into effect (from 77.9% to 80.9% to 85.2%). This was the highest usage rate achieved in Florida at the time. By June 2010, Florida's seat belt use increased to 87.4%. The 2010 gain was from a baseline that was 6.4 percentage points higher than in 2009.

Figure 1. Percentage Changes in Florida's Observed Seat Belt Use, 2008-2010

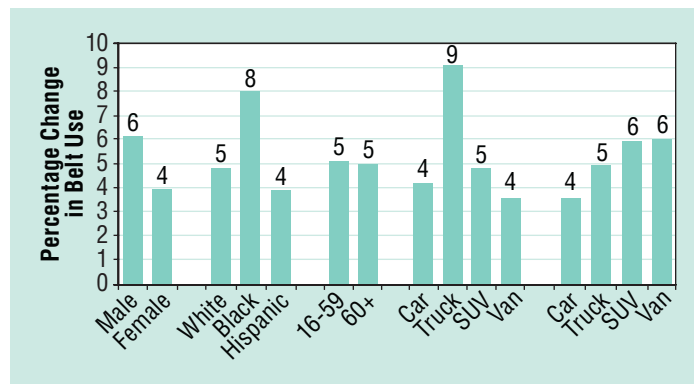


Increases in Seat Belt Use by Subgroup

Observed seat belt use after the upgrade to primary enforcement increased for all road types, all days of

the week, males and females, drivers and passengers, all ages, and all vehicle types. Consistent with past primary law upgrade research, the impact was greatest for low-use groups including: males (+6.1 points), compared with females (+3.9 points); Blacks (+ 8.0 points), compared with Whites (+4.7 points) or Hispanics (+3.8 points); and occupants of pickup trucks (+9.1), compared with passenger cars (+4.3 points), SUVs (+4.7 points), or vans (+3.5 points). Impact was greater on local (collector) roads (+7.9 points) than on other roadway types. Figure 2 shows the percentage change for each of these groups. Figures 3-6 show observed use rates for each group.

Figure 2. Percentage Increases in Seat Belt Use Associated With Primary Law Change, by Subgroup



Changes in Public Awareness and Perceptions About the Primary Belt Law

Immediately after the primary law went into effect, the statewide survey found that more than 9 out of 10 respondents were aware that a police officer could stop and ticket solely for a seat belt violation and nearly 8 out of 10 supported such action. About three of four drivers saw or heard something about the enforcement, indicating that paid and earned media were having a positive effect.

Table 1. Statewide and Regional Perceptions About Seat Belt Issues, July 2009, Percentage

Issue/Perception		State-wide	North FL	Central FL	South FL
It is important to enforce the SB Law (yes)	%	87.5%	88.4%	84.3%	91.5%
	N	1,650	772	557	321
Chance of getting stopped (always or nearly always)	%	59.2%	61.6%	55.9%	59.9%
	N	1,105	535	369	201
Saw or heard about enforcement (yes)	%	72.6%	73.9%	74.8%	65.1%
	N	1,365	644	495	226
Saw or heard about seat belts (yes)	%	85.5%	85.9%	86.2%	83.1%
	N	1,608	750	568	290
Officer can stop solely for SB violation (yes)	%	93.7%	93.9%	95.1%	90.7%
	N	1,743	814	617	312
Officer should be able to stop for SB violation	%	77.0%	76.4%	77.0%	78.8%
	N	1,429	659	503	267

Conclusions

Florida is the largest of a very recent group of States to enact primary law upgrades and the first of this group to be evaluated. It had the second highest baseline rate at 81% in observed seat belt use of any upgrade State to date. Florida has a relatively high fine of \$30 for failing to buckle up, which with fees and court costs totals more than \$90.

The 4.3-percentage-point gain in observed belt use is a positive result, particularly on the heels of a 3-point gain after the CIOT mobilization. The gain in the 36 northern counties of the State (from April 2009 through June 2010) was nearly 13 percentage points and was largely due to the fact that there was no decay of the gains made after the 2009 CIOT and the law change. This, in turn, may have been associated with rural enforcement and publicity ongoing in the northern region that helped sustain the impact of the law change and CIOT from the previous year.

Seat belt use in Florida increased significantly after the primary law upgrade, most notably among low-use groups.

How to Order

Download a copy of *Impact of Implementing a Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Law in Florida: A Case Study*, prepared by Preusser Research Group (68 pages) from <http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811656.pdf>.



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Figure 3. Trends in Statewide Observed Usage by Vehicle Type, 2008-2010

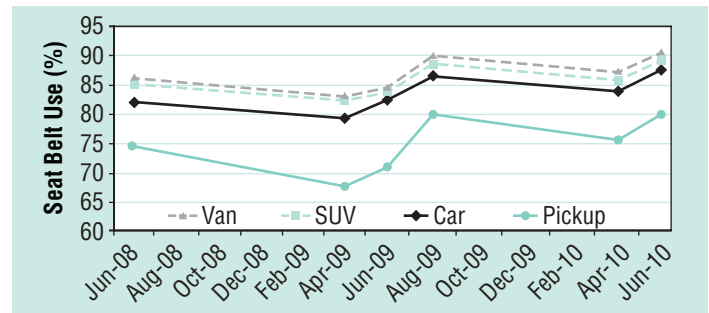


Figure 4. Trends in Statewide Observed Usage by Race and Ethnicity, 2008-2010

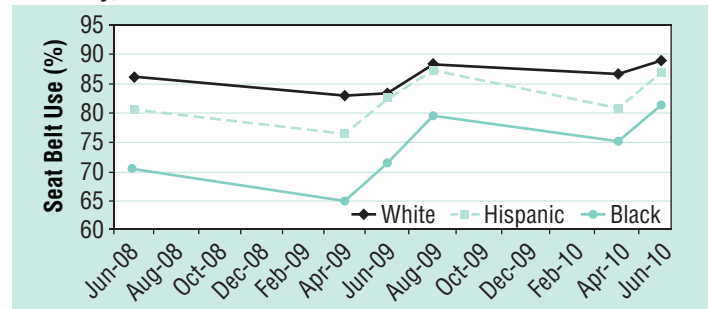


Figure 5. Trends in Statewide Observed Usage, by Roadway Type, 2008-2010

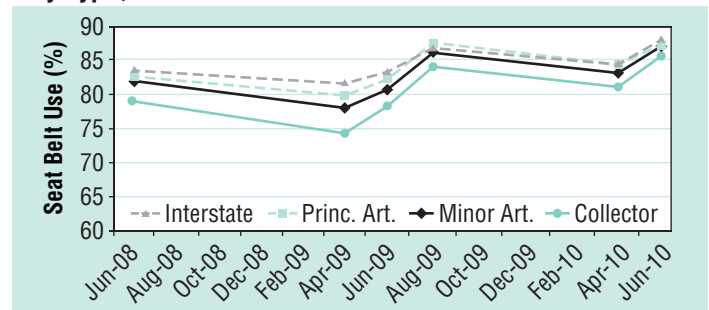
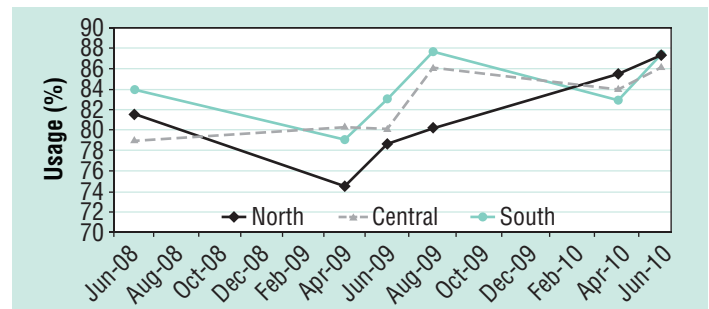


Figure 6. Trends in Statewide Observed Usage, by Region, 2008-2010



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