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.

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.
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