

Uniform Guidelines *for* State Highway Safety Programs



November 2006

Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 20

Occupant Protection

Each State, in cooperation with its political subdivisions, tribal governments, and other parties as appropriate, should develop and implement a comprehensive highway safety program, reflective of State demographics, to achieve a significant reduction in traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries on public roads. The highway safety program should include a comprehensive occupant protection program that educates and motivates the public to properly use available motor vehicle occupant protection systems. A combination of legislation and use requirements, enforcement, communication, education, and incentive strategies is necessary to achieve significant, lasting increases in seat belt and child safety seat usage. This guideline describes the components that a State occupant protection program should include and the criteria that the program components should meet.

I. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Each State should have centralized program planning, implementation, and coordination to achieve and sustain high rates of seat belt use. Evaluation should be used to revise existing programs, develop new programs and determine progress and success. The State Highway Safety Office (SHSO) should:

- Provide leadership, training and technical assistance to other State agencies and local occupant protection programs and projects;
- Establish and convene an occupant protection advisory task force or coalition to organize and generate broad-based support for programs. The coalition should include agencies and organizations that are representative of the State's demographic composition and critical to the implementation of occupant protection initiatives;
- Integrate occupant protection programs into community/corridor traffic safety and other injury prevention programs; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the State's occupant protection program.

II. LEGISLATION, REGULATION AND POLICY

Each State should enact and enforce occupant protection use laws, regulations, and policies to provide clear guidance to the public concerning motor vehicle occupant protection systems. This legal framework should include:

- Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires all motor vehicle occupants to use systems provided by the vehicle manufacturer;
- Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires that children from birth to 16 years old (or the State's driving age) be properly restrained in an appropriate child restraint system (i.e., certified by the manufacturer to meet all applicable Federal safety standards) or seat belt;
- Legislation permitting primary enforcement that requires children under 13 years old to be properly restrained in the rear seat (unless all available rear seats are occupied by younger children);
- Graduated driver licensing laws that include three stages of licensure, and that place restrictions and sanctions on high-risk driving situations for novice drivers (i.e., nighttime driving restrictions, passenger restrictions, zero tolerance, required seat belt use);
- Regulations requiring employees and contractors at all levels of government to wear safety belts when traveling on official business;
- Official policies requiring that organizations receiving Federal highway safety program grant funds develop and enforce an employee seat belt use policy; and
- Encouragement to motor vehicle insurers to offer economic incentives for policyholders who wear seat belts and secure children in child safety seats or other appropriate restraints.

III. ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

Each State should conduct frequent, high-visibility law enforcement efforts, coupled with communication strategies, to increase seat belt and child safety seat use. Essential components of a law enforcement program include:

- Written, enforced seat belt use policies for law enforcement agencies with sanctions for noncompliance to protect law enforcement officers from harm and for officers to serve as role models for the motoring public;
- Vigorous enforcement of seat belt and child safety seat laws, including citations and warnings;
- Accurate reporting of occupant protection system information on police accident report forms, including seat belt and child safety seat use or nonuse, restraint type, and air bag presence and deployment;
- Communication campaigns to inform the public about occupant protection laws and related enforcement activities;
- Routine monitoring of citation rates for nonuse of seat belts and child safety seats;
- Use of National Child Passenger Safety Certification (basic and in-service) for law enforcement officers; and
- Utilization of law enforcement liaisons, for activities such as promotion of national and local mobilizations and increasing law enforcement participation in such mobilizations and collaboration with local chapters of police groups and associations that represent diverse groups to gain support for enforcement efforts.

IV. COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

As part of each State's communication program, the State should enlist the support of a variety of media, including mass media, to improve public awareness and knowledge and to support enforcement efforts to about seat belts, air bags, and child safety seats. Communication programs and materials should be culturally relevant and multilingual as appropriate. To sustain or increase rates of seat belt and child safety seat use, a well organized, effectively managed communication program should:

- Identify specific audiences (e.g., low-belt-use, high-risk motorists) and develop messages appropriate for these audiences;
- Address the enforcement of the State's seat belt and child passenger safety laws; the safety benefits of regular, correct seat belt (both manual and automatic) and child safety seat use; and the additional protection provided by air bags;
- Capitalize on special events, such as nationally recognized safety and injury prevention weeks and local enforcement campaigns;
- Provide material and media campaigns in more than one language as necessary;
- Use national themes and material;
- Participate in national programs to increase seat belt and child safety seat use and use law enforcement as the State's contribution to obtaining national public awareness through concentrated, simultaneous activity;
- Utilize paid media, as appropriate;
- Publicize seat belt use surveys and other relevant statistics;
- Encourage news media to report seat belt use and nonuse in motor vehicle crashes;
- Involve media representatives in planning and disseminating communication campaigns;
- Encourage private sector groups to incorporate seat belt use messages into their media campaigns;
- Utilize and involve all media outlets: television, radio, print, signs, billboards, theaters, sports events, health fairs; and
- Evaluate all communication campaign efforts.

V. OCCUPANT PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN PROGRAM

Each State should enact occupant protection laws that require the correct restraint of all children, in all seating positions and in every vehicle. Regulations and policies should exist that provide clear guidance to the motoring public concerning occupant protection for children. Each State should require that children from birth to 16 years old (or the State's driving age) be properly restrained in the appropriate child restraint system or seat belt. Gaps in State child passenger safety and seat belt laws should be closed to ensure that all children are covered in all seating positions, with requirements for age-appropriate child restraint use. Key provisions of the law should include: driver responsibility for ensuring that children are properly restrained; proper restraint of children under 13 years of age in the rear seat (unless all available rear seats are occupied by younger children); a requirement that passengers be in designated seating positions, a ban on passengers in the cargo areas of light trucks; and a limit on the number of passengers based on the number of available

seat belts in the vehicle. To achieve these objectives, State occupant protection programs for children should:

- Collect and analyze key data elements in order to evaluate the program progress;
- Assure that adequate and accurate training is provided to the professionals who deliver and enforce the occupant protection programs for parents and caregivers;
- Assure that the capability exists to train and retain nationally certified child passenger safety technicians to address attrition of trainers or changing public demographics;
- Promote the use of child restraints and assure that a plan has been developed to provide an adequate number of inspection stations and clinics, which meet minimum quality criteria;
- Continue programs and activities to increase the use of booster seats by children who outgrow infant or convertible child safety seats but are still too small to safely use seat belts.
- Maintain a strong law enforcement program that includes vigorous enforcement of the child occupant protection laws;
- Enlist the support of the media to increase public awareness about child occupant protection laws and the use of child restraints. Strong efforts should be made to reach underserved populations;
- Assure that the child occupant protection programs at the local level are periodically assessed and that programs are designed to meet the unique demographic needs of the community;
- Establish the infrastructure to systematically coordinate the array of child occupant protection program components;
- Encourage law enforcement participation in the National Child Passenger Safety Certification (basic and in-service) training for law enforcement officers; and
- Consider carefully crafted and administered child safety seat subsidy and/or give-away programs.

VI. OUTREACH PROGRAM

Each State should encourage extensive statewide and community involvement in occupant protection education by involving individuals and organizations outside the traditional highway safety community. Representation from the health, business, and education sectors, and from diverse populations within the community, should be encouraged. Community involvement should broaden public support for the State's programs and increase a State's ability to deliver highway safety education programs. To encourage statewide and community involvement, States should:

- Establish a coalition or task force of individuals and organizations to actively promote use of occupant protection systems;
- Create an effective communications network among coalition members to keep members informed about issues;
- Provide culturally relevant material and resources necessary to conduct occupant protection education programs, especially directed toward young people, in local settings; and
- Provide material and resources necessary to conduct occupant protection education programs, especially

directed toward specific cultural or otherwise diverse populations represented in the State and in its political subdivisions.

States should undertake a variety of outreach programs to achieve statewide and community involvement in occupant protection education, as described below. Programs should include outreach to diverse populations, health and medical communities, schools and employers.

A. DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Each State should work closely with individuals and organizations that represent the various ethnic and cultural populations reflected in State demographics. Individuals from these groups might not be reached through traditional communication markets. Community leaders and representatives from the various ethnic and cultural groups and organizations will help States to increase the use of child safety seats and seat belts. The State should:

- Evaluate the need for, and provide, if necessary, material and resources in multiple languages;
- Collect and analyze data on fatalities and injuries in diverse communities;
- Ensure representation of diverse groups on State occupant protection coalitions and other work groups;
- Provide guidance to grantees on conducting outreach in diverse communities;
- Utilize leaders from diverse communities as spokespeople to promote seat belt use and child safety seats; and
- Conduct outreach efforts to diverse organizations and populations during law enforcement mobilization periods.

B. HEALTH AND MEDICAL COMMUNITIES

Each State should integrate occupant protection into health programs. The failure of drivers and passengers to use occupant protection systems is a major public health problem that must be recognized by the medical and health care communities. The SHSO, the State Health Department, and other State or local medical organizations should collaborate in developing programs that:

- Integrate occupant protection into professional health training curricula and comprehensive public health planning;
- Promote occupant protection systems as a health promotion/injury prevention measure;
- Require public health and medical personnel to use available motor vehicle occupant protection systems during work hours;
- Provide technical assistance and education about the importance of motor vehicle occupant protection to primary caregivers (e.g., doctors, nurses, clinic staff);
- Include questions about seat belt use in health risk appraisals;
- Utilize health care providers as visible public spokespeople for seat belt use and child safety seat use;
- Provide information about the availability of child safety seats at, and integrate child safety seat

inspections into, maternity hospitals and other prenatal and natal care centers; and

- Collect, analyze, and publicize data on additional injuries and medical expenses resulting from nonuse of occupant protection devices.

C. SCHOOLS

Each State should encourage local school boards and educators to incorporate occupant protection education into school curricula. The SHSO in cooperation with the State Department of Education should:

- Ensure that highway safety and traffic-related injury control, in general, and occupant protection, in particular, are included in the State-approved K-12 health and safety education curricula and textbooks;
- Establish and enforce written policies requiring that school employees use seat belts when operating a motor vehicle on the job;
- Encourage active promotion of regular seat belt use through classroom and extracurricular activities as well as in school-based health clinics;
- Work with school resource officers to promote seat belt use among high school students; and
- Establish and enforce written school policies that require students driving to and from school to wear seat belts. Violation of these policies should result in revocation of parking or other campus privileges for a stated period of time.

D. EMPLOYERS

Each State and local subdivision should encourage all employers to require seat belt use on the job as a condition of employment. Private sector employers should follow the lead of Federal and State government employers and comply with Executive Order 13043, "Increasing Seat Belt Use in the United States," as well as all applicable Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Regulations or Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations requiring private business employees to use seat belts on the job. All employers should:

- Establish and enforce a seat belt use policy with sanctions for nonuse; and
- Conduct occupant protection education programs for employees on their seat belt use policies and the safety benefits of motor vehicle occupant protection devices.

VII. DATA AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Each State should access and analyze reliable data sources for problem identification and program planning. Each State should conduct several different types of evaluation to effectively measure progress and to plan and implement new program strategies. Program management should:

- Conduct and publicize at least one statewide observational survey of seat belt and child safety seat use annually, ensuring that it meets current, applicable Federal guidelines;
- Maintain trend data on child safety seat use, seat belt use and air bag deployment in fatal crashes;

- Identify high-risk populations through observational usage surveys and crash statistics;
- Conduct and publicize statewide surveys of public knowledge and attitudes about occupant protection laws and systems;
- Obtain monthly or quarterly data from law enforcement agencies on the number of seat belt and child passenger safety citations and convictions;
- Evaluate the use of program resources and the effectiveness of existing general communication as well as special/high-risk population education programs;
- Obtain data on morbidity, as well as the estimated cost of crashes, and determine the relation of injury to seat belt use and nonuse; and
- Ensure that evaluation results are an integral part of new program planning and problem identification.