



U.S. Department
of Transportation

National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

TRAFFIC TECH

Technology Transfer Series



DOT HS 813 465

August 2023

A Guide for Traffic Safety Practitioners: Best Practices for Increasing Seat Belt Use in Rural Communities

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Rural motor vehicle occupants have an increased risk of crash-related death compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. One contributing factor is lower use of seat belts in rural areas. Rural drivers self-report more negative attitudes toward seat belt use than urban and suburban drivers. Convincing drivers and passengers in rural areas to wear seat belts is one of the most effective ways to reduce crash-related injuries and fatalities. Rural traffic safety practitioners may need to consider different strategies than those traditionally deployed in urban/suburban settings.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and others have sponsored varieties of programs and studies in the past to identify approaches to increase seat belt use in rural areas. This current project sought to review past efforts in order to create *A Guide for Traffic Safety Practitioners: Best Practices for Increasing Seat Belt Use in Rural Communities*. This resource provides rural traffic safety practitioners with the information they need to implement best practices, including examples of evidence-based and promising programs, to increase seat belt use in rural areas. The goal of this guide is to connect rural traffic safety practitioners to information and resources that can help them to develop, implement, and evaluate successful programs. The guide has four modules.

Module 1: Understanding Seat Belt Use in Rural Communities

Module 1 describes issues affecting seat belt use in rural communities and why there is need to address lower use among rural drivers and passengers. Topics:

- Traffic Safety and Seat Belt Use in Rural Communities
- The Costs of Not Using Seat Belts
- Barriers to Seat Belt Use in Rural Communities
- Populations of Focus for Rural Seat Belt Programs

Module 2: Selecting Evidence-Based or Promising Rural Seat Belt Program Models

Module 2 discusses how evidence-based and promising programs can promote seat belt use among rural drivers and passengers. It includes descriptions of seven program models and the evidence supporting each. Rural traffic safety practitioners can identify, adapt, and implement the models to meet the specific needs of their communities. Topics in Module 2:

- Rural Seat Belt Program Models
 - ◆ Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Laws and Increased Fines
 - ◆ Enhanced Seat Belt Enforcement Programs
 - Short-Term, High-Visibility Enforcement Programs
 - Integrated Nighttime Enforcement Programs
 - ◆ Media Campaigns in Combination With Enforcement
 - ◆ Youth-Focused Programs
 - ◆ Educational Programs for the General Public and Violators
 - ◆ Incentive-Based Programs
 - ◆ Workplace Programs
- Resources for Identifying Evidence-Based Seat Belt Programs

Module 3: Implementing a Rural Seat Belt Program

Module 3 presents the seven steps needed to fully implement, monitor, and sustain seat belt programs in rural communities. These steps are informed and adapted from existing public health program planning and implementation frameworks. The steps are described as a sequence, although some may be implemented concurrently. The steps covered in Module 3:

- Step 1: Identify Community Needs
- Step 2: Determine the Program Goal and Select a Strategy
- Step 3: Assess Resources and Costs
- Step 4: Engage Partners and Champions
- Step 5: Develop an Implementation Plan
- Step 6: Implement the Program
- Step 7: Sustain the Program

Module 4: Evaluating a Rural Seat Belt Program

Module 4 covers the benefits of evaluating rural seat belt programs and provides six steps for evaluating rural seat belt programs. The six steps are informed by NHTSA's *The Art of Appropriate Evaluation: A Guide for Safety Highway Program Managers* and follow the model of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Framework for Program Evaluation*. The module covers best practices from prior rural seat belt program evaluations and challenges the practitioner may face. Topics:

- Why Evaluation Matters
- Steps for Evaluating a Rural Seat Belt Program
 - ◆ Step 1: Engage Stakeholders
 - ◆ Step 2: Describe the Program
 - ◆ Step 3: Focus Evaluation Design
 - ◆ Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence
 - ◆ Step 5: Justify Conclusions
 - ◆ Step 6: Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned
- Evaluation Challenges

Summary

This guide was based on a thorough review of available information on successful programs in rural traffic safety programs and other public health domains. It provides background information to help the reader better understand the different types of problems a traffic safety practitioner may face in rural communities, how to identify an approach that will likely work in a given locale, how to implement a rural seat belt program, and how to evaluate whether the program was successful. The guide includes links to numerous other documents or web-based resources in order to provide a launching point for anyone interested in finding ways to increase seat belt use to further improve traffic safety in rural communities across the United States.

Reference

Graham, L. A., Thomas, F. D., Bayne, A., Fell, J., Siegfried, A., Scolese, J., Isaacs, L., & Stauffer, P. (in press). *A guide for traffic safety practitioners: Best practices for increasing seat belt use in rural communities*. (Report No. DOT HS 813 464). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Suggested APA format citation for this document is:

Office of Impaired Driving and Occupant Protection (2023, August). *A guide for traffic safety practitioners: Best practices for increasing seat belt use in rural communities*. (Traffic Tech Technology Transfer Series. Report No. DOT HS 813 465). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.



U.S. Department of Transportation
**National Highway Traffic Safety
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