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America Buckles Up, But Could Do Better

Traffic Safety Facts

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America Buckles Up, But Could Do Better

Buckle Up America (BUA) was a national initiative announced January 1997 directing the Department of Transportation (DOT) to prepare a plan to increase seat belt usage across the country. In response, the DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) developed a plan to increase national seat belt use to 85 percent by 2000, and decrease fatalities to children under the age of five by 15 percent by 2000.

Preusser Research Group, Inc. conducted an evaluation of BUA to measure progress in increasing occupant restraint use and reducing fatalities. Program evaluation data included multiple sources of seat observation results, Fatality Analysis Reporting System data (FARS), and law enforcement citation data. Case studies were conducted in locations showing exemplary progress.

Seat belt use rates increased after the inception of BUA. However, in 1998 and again in 1999, only five states and the District of Columbia were at or above 80 percent belt use; all are jurisdictions having standard seat belt laws. Child restraint use improved markedly for children under age five and fatalities decreased dramatically (-11.9%). By the end of 1998, BUA was nearing its goal of reducing child fatalities by 15 percent, but was still well short of the goal of 85 percent belt use nationwide.

There are four components to BUA: **building partnerships**, to bring all aspects of the community to bear; **enacting new legislation**, to make it clear that elected officials are behind BUA; **conducting strong enforcement**, to make sure the public understands that non-use can have immediate costs; and **expanding public information & education**, to continue educating and motivating the public to use seat belts and to provide specific how-to knowledge to those using child safety seats.

Occupant Restraint Use

Belt use reported by the states for 1998 indicated that usage was above 85 percent in only one state, California, and at or above 80 percent in four states (Maryland, New Mexico, Oregon, and Hawaii) and the District of Columbia. All of these locations have standard enforcement of seat belt laws. The National Occupant Protection Usage Survey (NOPUS) showed that belt use increased from 1994 to 1996 (to 61.3 %) and even more from 1996 to 1998 (to 68.9 %), during the early years of BUA. NOPUS results indicate that the largest improvements occurred with child safety seat usage, mostly for children ages one through four.

| Year | Seat Belt Use Rate (%) |
|------|------------------------|
| 88 | 45 |
| 89 | 46 |
| 90 | 49 |
| 91 | 59 |
| 92 | 62 |
| 93 | 66 |
| 94 | 67 |
| 95 | 68 |
| 96 | 68 |
| 97 | 69 |
| 98 | 69 |
| 99 | 70 |

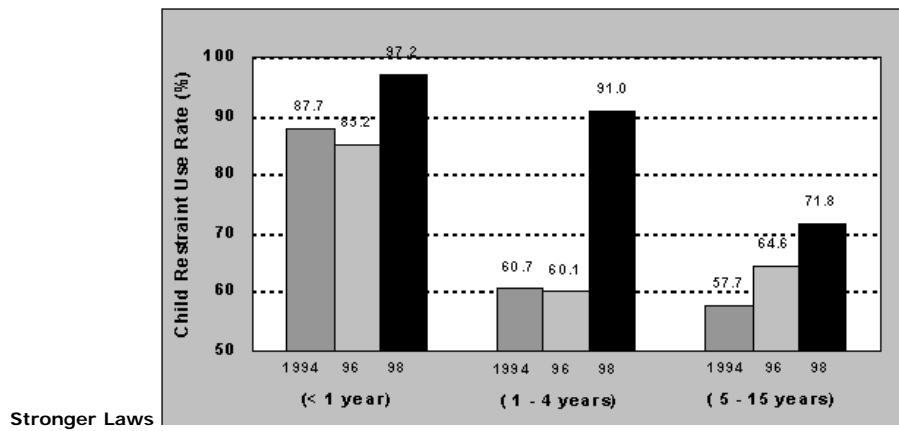
Fatalities to Children under Age Five Decline

BUA made large strides toward its goal of decreasing fatalities to children under age five. Fatalities decreased dramatically for children under age one (down 20.9%) and for children ages one through four (down 8.6%). Fewer fatalities occurred in situations where no restraint was used, and fewer occurred to children using child seats.

Enforcement

Seat belt and child safety seat enforcement increased under the umbrella of BUA programs. Seat belt enforcement data, collected from 32 states, showed that citations increased in number (up 7.8% across all

states) and on a per-resident basis (up 5.7 %). Child seat enforcement data, from 29 states, showed that citations also increased in number (up 8.3% across all states) and on a per-resident basis (up 6.1%). This varied by city size, state police, and type of law.



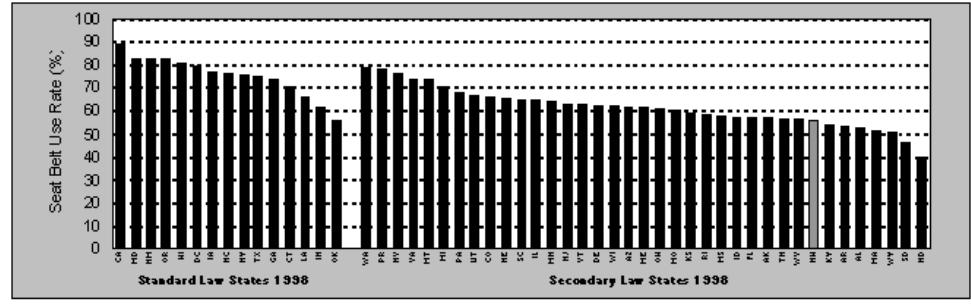
Since 1997, six states (Maryland, Indiana, Oklahoma, Alabama, New Jersey, and Michigan) and the District of Columbia passed a primary or standard enforcement seat belt law. Many other states considered new legislation to strengthen their seat belt laws, but for various reasons, were not successful in getting them enacted.

BUA Partners and Public Information

& Education

Numerous private and nonprofit groups raised awareness and made positive impacts on occupant protection usage. One notable participant, the Air Bag and Seat Belt Safety Campaign, promoted highly visible occupant protection enforcement. The report describes interesting and innovative PI&E programs from some of the notable participants including auto manufacturers, insurance companies, and trucking firms.

Buckle Up America is still far from its goal of 85 percent belt usage nationwide in 2000, but has made remarkable progress towards decreasing fatalities to children under the age of five.



HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of ***Process and Outcome Evaluation of The Buckle Up America Initiative***, (38 pages) write to the Office of Research and Traffic Records, NHTSA, NTS-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC, 20590, fax (202) 366-7096, or download from www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Linda Cosgrove, Ph.D., was the contract manager.

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