

REFERENCE SERIES: Transportation in Connecticut

ARTICLE NO. 13a Occupant Protection

NHTSA Highway Safety Mini-Series

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This simple guide is part of a mini-series that provides insight on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) programs relating to Connecticut's transportation system. The article focuses on Connecticut Department of Transportation's (CT DOT) initiatives under the Occupant Protection Program, including participation in national campaigns for encouraging protection for all vehicle occupants.

Special thanks are given to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for support of programs described in this mini-series.

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Overview

Oversight of the Occupant Protection Program in Connecticut is performed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (CT DOT) Highway Safety Office (HSO) on behalf of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The general goal of Connecticut's Occupant Protection Program is to maintain safety belt use rates at a level that is consistently above the national average.

The latest information available through National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) indicates an 85 percent National safety belt use rate. Generally over the past several years the Connecticut Safety Belt Usage Rate has gradually increased.

The highest usage rate (88.4 percent) ever achieved in our State was in 2011. There have not been any huge departures up or down in the last five years of the number of reported fatalities of restrained occupants with the exception of 2009 which was much higher than 2008 and 2010. The three year moving average was relatively constant.

CT DOT Highway Safety Information Online: www.ct.gov/dot

Navigate to Programs and Services > Travel Resources > Safety

Awareness Promotion

Efforts undertaken are designed to increase awareness and adherence to Connecticut's occupant protection laws with a priority given to enforcement and education.

- Partnerships have been built with representatives from law enforcement, media, health professionals, education, and local civic organizations.
- Programming includes enforcement activities, such as checkpoints and participation in national mobilizations.
- Public information and education activities are conducted by the CT DOT HSO staff and by State and local law enforcement personnel.
- Information is disseminated through one-on-one contact, media announcements and a variety of support materials.
- Concentrated safety belt mobilization efforts have included participation in national Click it or Ticket mobilizations, "Buckle Up America Week" and "Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week" to increase awareness of the need for proper use of safety belts and child safety seats.
- The CT DOT HSO staff also conducts public outreach at safety and health fairs along with a variety of sporting and other special event venues.

Highlight:

Motorists should buckle up every time they go out, both day and night.

- In fatal crashes during 2011, 77 percent of passenger vehicle occupants who were thrown from their vehicles were killed. However, only 1 percent of crash victims who were buckled up were totally ejected from their vehicles, compared to 31 percent of those who were unbelted.
- Motorists are 75 percent less likely to be killed in a rollover crash if they are buckled up.
- In 2011, of the 21,253 passenger vehicle occupants who were killed in motor vehicle crashes nationwide, 52 percent were NOT wearing seat belts at the time of their fatal crashes.
- From 2007-2011, 53 percent of the 121,507 passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were unrestrained.
- Younger motorists—young men in particular—are most at risk. Among teens and young adults, ages 18-34, who were killed in fatal crashes in 2011, 64 percent were NOT buckled up at the time of the crash—the highest percentage of any age group. The number jumps to 66 percent when only men in this age group are included.
- Pickup truck drivers and passengers are also at risk. In 2011, 65 percent of pickup truck occupants who were killed in traffic crashes were not buckled up at the time of the crashes, compared to 46 percent of passenger car occupants who were killed from not buckling up.

-NHTSA

Highlight:

Seat belts save over 13,000 lives every year. One of them could be yours. The top 5 things you should know about buckling up:

1. **Buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself in a crash.** – In 2008, seat belts saved more than 13,000 lives nationwide. From 2004 to 2008, seat belts saved over 75,000 lives — enough people to fill a large sports arena. During a crash, being buckled up helps keep you safe and secure inside your vehicle, whereas being completely thrown out of a vehicle is almost always deadly. Seat belts are the best defense against impaired, aggressive, and distracted drivers.
2. **Air bags are designed to work with seat belts, not replace them.** – In fact, if you don't wear your seat belt, you could be thrown into a rapidly opening frontal air bag; a movement of such force could injure or even kill you. See www.safercar.gov for more on air bag safety.
3. **Buckle up safely** – The lap belt and shoulder belt are secured across the pelvis and rib cage, which are more able to withstand crash forces than other parts of your body. Follow the guidelines:
 - Place the shoulder belt across the middle of your chest and away from your neck.
 - Adjust the lap belt across your hips below your stomach.
 - **NEVER** put the shoulder belt behind your back or under an arm.
4. **Fit matters.** –
 - Before you buy a new car, check to see that its seat belts are a good fit for you.
 - Ask your dealer about seat belt adjusters, which can help you get the best fit.
 - If you need a roomier belt, contact your vehicle manufacturer to obtain seat belt extenders.
 - If you drive an older or classic car with lap belts only, check with your vehicle manufacturer about how to retrofit your car with today's safer lap/shoulder belts.
5. **Occupant protection is for everyone.** – Visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web site at www.nhtsa.gov and click on 4 Steps for Kids to find out how to secure your littlest passengers. If you're expecting a little one, check out NHTSA's "Should pregnant women wear seat belts?" brochure online to learn how important it is for you — and your unborn child — to buckle up the right way every trip, every time.

-NHTSA

Highlight:

The Pregnant Woman's Guide to Buckling Up

1. “I’m pregnant. Should I wear a seat belt?”

Yes. Doctors recommend it. In a crash, a seat belt is the best protection for both you and your unborn child.

2. “Should I adjust my seat?”

Yes. You should move the front seat back as far as possible. If you’re driving, make sure that you can still comfortably reach the pedals. But always keep at least 10 inches between the center of your chest and the steering wheel cover or dashboard. As your abdomen grows during pregnancy, adjust your seat to maintain this 10-inch minimum.

3. “What if my car or truck has air bags?”

You still need to buckle up. Air bags are designed to work with seat belts, not replace them. Without a seat belt, you could be thrown into a rapidly opening frontal air bag, which could injure or even kill you and your unborn child. Also, if you’re not buckled up, you could collide with other passengers or be ejected from the vehicle.

4. “Should I turn the air bag off if my vehicle has an ON-OFF air-bag-disabling switch?”

No. Doctors recommend that pregnant women wear seat belts and leave air bags turned on. Seat belts and air bags work together to provide the best protection for you and your unborn child.

5. “What’s the right way to wear my seat belt?”

The shoulder belt should lay across your chest (between your breasts) and away from your neck.

-NHTSA

Highlight:

Child and Booster Seat Importance

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children age 1 through 12 years old. Based on NHTSA crash data in 2010, almost an average of 2 children (age 12 and younger in a passenger vehicle) were killed and 325 were injured each day. This fatality rate could be reduced by about half if the correct child safety seat were always used.
- Three out of four kids are not as secure in the car as they should be because their car seats are not being used correctly.
- Using the correct restraints reduces infants’ and toddlers’ chances for fatal injury by 71% and 54% in passenger cars, respectively.

-NHTSA

Statewide Usage Survey

In the spring of 2011, statewide scientific survey revealed an 88.4 percent safety belt usage rate. The survey determined statewide safety belt usage for drivers and front seat passengers in passenger vehicles only, during daytime hours. After the spring WAVE period, the full statewide survey was conducted; this survey established the statewide rate for the year.

Convincer/Rollover Demonstrations

Law enforcement officials offered Convincer/Rollover public demonstration programs. These demonstrations provide the opportunity for individuals to experience a low-speed impact to "convince" the rider that they need to wear a safety belt when riding in a vehicle. The Rollover simulator also demonstrates the need for safety belt use by providing a visual experience of what happens when a vehicle is involved in a rollover crash.

In 2011, the State Police conducted Safety Belt Convincer demonstrations at 89 events and Rollover simulator demonstrations at 47 events. There were 1,716 people who were permitted to ride the Convincer and an estimated 38,660 people viewed the Rollover demonstrations.

WAVE/Mobilization

The CT DOT HSO continued to conduct traffic enforcement in the area of occupant protection, referred to as WAVE/Mobilization efforts. Each WAVE directed a concentrated enforcement effort designed to enforce Connecticut's seat belt laws.

For example, in a typical "Click it or Ticket" campaign, the safety belt enforcement WAVE begins with a pre-WAVE seat belt observation survey. In addition to safety belt citations and child safety seat citations, enforcement activities during the WAVE might include speeding citations, DUI arrests and miscellaneous violations. Following a WAVE, an average post-WAVE safety belt usage rate is recorded through a driver survey. The pre and post-WAVE surveys provide feedback on the statewide rate throughout the year. All surveys monitor performance and activity relating to safety restraint usage.

Multi-Media

As part of the Occupant Protection Program, multi-media campaigns are often undertaken. These typically include print media, radio and television spots that served to complement enforcement efforts. Whenever possible, thirty-second commercials are aired statewide across several broadcast television stations and cable systems. These intense media "blitzes" are timed to coincide with the two week WAVE/Mobilization.

Spanish Language Outreach

The CT DOT HSO has utilized a multi-media campaign that included a Spanish language television and radio component featuring both paid and bonus spots. The intent is delivery of a culturally-relevant message through broadcast media to educate those in the Latino community about the importance of using seat belts and upcoming traffic safety enforcement activities.

Educational Materials

The CT DOT HSO and its many partners have supported the campaign through efforts that complemented mobilization/enforcement campaigns and helped increase safety belt and child safety seat use. Thousands of pieces of educational materials on occupant protection were disseminated to the public at sporting venues, safety and health fairs. The CT DOT HSO staff interacts with the public at outreach venues throughout the year, with additional emphasis during WAVE/Mobilization periods.

Venue Partners

Examples of partnering efforts with several larger arenas in 2011 are highlighted here.

- The CT DOT HSO partnered with Mohegan Sun to promote and distribute educational materials regarding car seat safety, teen driving safety, seat belt safety, motorcycle safety and to discuss the dangers of drinking and driving.
- The New Britain Rock Cats baseball team partnered with the CT DOT HSO to promote the Click It or Ticket message as part of the statewide campaign. A Click It or Ticket billboard was displayed for the entire season. To support the campaign there was a rewards ticket program, a custom video board message, a premium promotional item give-away night, a nightly Click it or Ticket video board announcement, and numerous tabling opportunities. Latino Beisbol Fiesta, a bi-lingual game day program, promoted buckling up by use of the video board and stadium signage.
- The CT DOT HSO partnered with the Connecticut Whale to promote the following Highway Traffic Safety initiatives: Educational information and promotions of Click It or Ticket, underage drinking prevention, drinking and driving prevention, distracted driving prevention and child passenger safety. This provided the Highway Safety staff tremendous opportunity to interact with guests attending the events. Signage with the Click It or Ticket slogan was displayed inside of the arena as well as on the outdoor marquee. The effort also included promotional tags on local radio stations, opening and closing billboards, magnetic calendar schedules and numerous tabling opportunities.
- The CT DOT HSO also partnered with the Bridgeport Sound Tigers Hockey Team to promote highway traffic safety initiatives. This included the national campaigns of Click it or Ticket and Over the Limit Under Arrest, underage drinking prevention, distracted driving prevention and child passenger safety. The Click It or Ticket message was displayed on the outdoor marquee which is visible from the highway for all motorists to see. There were In-Ice Logos, the Storm Van Wrap, Video Board,

Public Address Announcements, a magnetic calendar schedule and unlimited tabling opportunities to interact with guests attending the events including the COOL Fun 101 Kids Festival, a special promotion day that was attended by thousands of children.

- DOT partnered with the Bridgeport Bluefish to promote car seat safety, seat belt safety, safe teen driving, and to discuss the dangers of drinking and driving. Staff attended several tabling opportunities to interact with guests attending the event.
- A new partner, the Connecticut Tigers baseball team, partnered with the CT DOT HSO to promote highway traffic safety messages through the Pitch/Speed Temperature Sign, parking lot banners, two billboards and at tabling nights.
- The Waterford Speedbowl partnered with the CT DOT HSO to address safety belt safety and impaired driving prevention at several family night race car events throughout the season.
- The CT DOT HSO partnered with the Rentschler Field to produce and distribute Click it or Ticket hand warmers which were distributed at a University of Connecticut Football Team home game.
- The CT DOT HSO also partnered with Live Nations at their Comcast Theater and Oakdale Theater sites to promote highway traffic safety outreach program initiatives. The CT DOT HSO staff members promoted Click it or Ticket and Over the Limit Under Arrest, underage drinking prevention, distracted driving prevention and child passenger safety prior to various stage productions at these venues including; Lady Antebellum, Vince Vaughn and Kevin James, David Garrett, Rain, Thomas and Friends, Dolly Parton and The Voice. Additionally, signage and banners were placed at strategic locations to educate patrons when arriving and leaving the venues.

Other Notes and Resources

The information in this article is provided as a first step in understanding the transportation planning, development, design and implementation process. Many topics focus on elements particularly relevant to locally administered transportation projects. The full detail of the process, particularly rules of eligibility, special provisions, requirements, or constraints is not within the purview of this reference document. It is imperative that municipal staff contact their RPO early in the process for guidance.

In addition to the CT DOT website at www.ct.gov/dot, the Local Project Administration website of the University of Connecticut's CTI-Technology Transfer Center provides many resources for municipal staff and managers of local projects: www.t2center.uconn.edu. Other articles in the Reference Series: Transportation in Connecticut are posted at the Department's website and can be located by navigating to Publications > Pamphlets.

Article No. 10, entitled "Performance Measurement and Asset Inventory", may also be of interest. This simple guide focuses on the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (CT DOT) initiatives in this arena as well as its vision to move towards performance and asset management. The recent passage of a federal transportation bill and related requirements are also briefly presented.

Connecticut...On The Move!

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This simple guide is a product of coordination between the Federal Highway Administration, University of Connecticut's CTI-Technology Transfer Center and the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation.

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