

Text for Nighttime Seat Belt Presentation to GHSA

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(opening slide)

Washington State has consistently been a national leader in seat belt use, particularly since 2002 when Washington became a primary enforcement state and began participating in the "Click it or Ticket" project. As most of you know, the Click it or Ticket model combines earned and paid media, a law enforcement message and seat belt-focused enforcement patrols.

Since 2002 Washington has had one of the highest rates of seat belt use in the country. The latest statewide observational survey showed Washington's seat belt use rate at 96.4%. The year before it was 96.3%. Their seat belt use rate has been in the mid-90's since 2002.

(slide two)

As we all know, the crash data shows that seat belt use among people who die in vehicle collisions doesn't mirror the use rates of the larger population. People who die in vehicle collisions could be said to be "...not a representative sample of the larger population." Among fatal crash victims there are those, certainly, who are just victims of circumstance, but often those involved in fatal crashes have bad driving records and, too, criminal records.

In analyzing their Washington State crash data, traffic safety folks noticed that the crash rate at night is at least four times higher than during the day. And seat belt use at night is lower.

To give you an illustration of this, (show chart), look at seat belt use among fatal crash victims by time of day from 2001 through 2007. In the morning hours (from 4 am until 10 am) and in the afternoon hours (from 11 a until 3 pm), seat belt use among fatal crash victims is between 16 and 23 percentage points higher than fatal crash victims who travel between 8:00 at night and 2:00 in the morning. Research conducted in other areas shows seat belt use at night drops between 6 and 8 percentage points.

We also know that traffic volumes drop off at night, particularly after the dinner hour commute -- or 7:00 -- yet traffic deaths don't drop off at night. In the evening there are drinking drivers, speeders and unbuckled, speeding drinking drivers, as well as reckless drivers, aggressive drivers, negligent drivers, unlicensed drivers and the like who combine to push the nighttime death rate to be at least four times what it is during the day.

(slide)

So ... what to do about this: Continue programs that target drinking drivers and other problem driving behaviors, and move the seat belt-focused patrols to the hours of darkness. Perhaps in so doing, you'll improve nighttime seat belt use and lower the nighttime traffic death rate. But at what cost?

The Traffic Safety Commission enlisted the help of the Washington State Patrol to develop a method of targeting seat belt law violators at night.

The State Patrol conducted a pilot operation in southwest Washington (in Vancouver). The plan called for having an "observing officer" who stood in a well-lit area at a busy intersection where traffic normally slows. When the officer observed an unbuckled motorist, he called ahead to a strategically placed contact vehicle that made the stop. For this reason nighttime seat belt patrols require the work of several officers.

The results of the first patrol were impressive. (slide of results) In just a four hour period (1800 – 2200 hours) and on a weekday (Wednesday), one State Patrol Sergeant (an observer) and four Troopers (chase cars) generated the following activity:

- 41 total contacts;
- 29 seatbelt violations;
- 1 DUI arrest;
- 6 Drug arrests;
- 2 Warrant arrests (1 felony -- 1 misdemeanor);
- 5 suspended driving arrests;
- 6 uninsured motorist infractions; and
- 2 stolen vehicles were recovered

After several pilot enforcement projects like this and numerous conversations with NHTSA, the Traffic Safety Commission was given a 403 grant to implement a statewide nighttime seat belt project. The plan calls for two mobilizations per year, with more localized "sustained" enforcement in between. The first mobilization was conducted in May, 2007. The final one for purposes of this project will be May, 2009.

My firm, Dunlap and Associates, is conducting the research project on the program. We expect to have our final report done in September, 2009.

I will insert slide with outline of the evaluation to show its detail

(slide)

Once in the implementation phase, the Commission found that moving seat belt patrols to the nighttime hours has its challenges.

With a daytime seat belt patrol, an officer might just tack on a few extra over-time hours to his or her shift either before starting work or after their normal work shift. Daytime patrols are easy to conduct and easy to schedule.

An officer on a nighttime seat belt patrol struggles with the challenge of being able to see an unbuckled motorist. The patrols require more advance organization to find a location that has ample lighting and that's safe for the observing officer; a location that has enough traffic at night to keep the officers busy. And nighttime seat belt patrols require the work of several officers.

The patrol methods needed for nighttime patrols were spelled out in an educational video developed by the Commission. Here is a sample of it. **(Show video clip).**

The Commission began the nighttime seat belt project with law enforcement lunchtime training meetings in nine cities where staff reviewed the "rules of engagement" that cops were being asked to follow. When they came into the training, many of the officers complained about the nighttime seat belt patrols. After the trainings, most cops at least understood how the patrols could be done and why the Commission was moving seat belt patrols to the hours of darkness.

(slide)

So now let's backtrack and compare the nighttime patrols with the daytime patrols.

1. Nighttime patrols require advance organizational work. The patrol supervisor needs to scout out a good location that has ample ambient lighting.
2. Nighttime patrols require the work of several officers. Law enforcement agencies are running understaffed. Getting one officer to tack on a few extra overtime hours before a shift or after is much easier than recruiting four officers to work a nighttime seat belt stationary patrol.
3. With daytime seat belt patrols, about 110 law enforcement agencies participated in the Commission's statewide mobilization. With nighttime patrols, about 55 – 60 agencies have been participating, despite the Commission's aggressive recruiting efforts.

That said, given the Commission's history of working with Washington law enforcement, enough agencies submitted grants to conduct nighttime patrols to cover the major population centers during the statewide mobilizations. Media publicity on the project has also been extensive. **(Show news clip.)**

As I mentioned earlier, an evaluation of the project is being conducted by my company – but the ticket results from the first three mobilizations give us some interesting data about who the officers are intercepting with these nighttime patrols. **(Show chart)**

Comparing nighttime seat belt patrols with daytime seat belt patrols we see that:

- The nighttime patrols net fewer seat belt tickets (17% fewer), but more child car seat violations (44% more),

- There was a 54% increase in the number of DUI citations written during nighttime seat belt patrols,
- During nighttime patrols officers made 4½ times more felony arrests than they did during the day.
- There was also a 12% increase in drug arrests with nighttime patrols.

All of this is consistent with what we've heard from law enforcement: that the bad boys come out at night. Or, as Jonna's grandmother used to say, "When darkness falls, the devil walks the earth." And she didn't even work in traffic safety.

Another way of looking at the law enforcement activity is to calculate the percentage of officer contacts that result in either a citation or a serious violation – and then compare these numbers with other traffic safety mobilization efforts. **(See chart)** When making these kinds of comparisons, here is what they found:

- Nighttime seat belt patrols result in more citations issued (as a percentage of the number of officer hours worked) than DUI patrols or daytime seat belt patrols. In addition, 1 in 4 officers on nighttime seat belt patrols functions as "an observer" who doesn't write tickets.
- Nighttime seat belt patrols result in nearly 4X as many serious violations as regular State Patrol traffic stops and twice as many as daytime seat belt patrols.
- In apprehending serious traffic violators and criminals, the nighttime seat belt patrols are twice as fruitful as daytime seat belt patrols and 4X more effective than routine State Patrol traffic stops.
- Daytime seat belt patrols result in more traffic stops -- 30 to 50% more officer contacts.
- The largest number of serious traffic law violators were apprehended with DUI-focused patrols.

Officers were surprised at the number of drivers who were cited for having unbuckled children in their cars – but research shows that people who buckle up are more likely to make their kids buckle up. And the corollary to that is: people who don't buckle up tend to let their children ride unbuckled, too.

I will move this stuff earlier

The project evaluation includes:

- Observational surveys before and after the two yearly statewide mobilizations. These surveys are conducted during the day and at night.
- Knowledge and awareness surveys distributed by Department of Licensing offices. Preliminary results show people really noticed the nighttime seat belt message.
- Surveys conducted at gas stations in four cities during the day and at night to supplement the other observational survey work.
- An analysis of traffic tickets issued during the day and at night. As a condition of getting overtime funds, law enforcement are asked to copy their tickets and mail

them to the Commission. The driving records and criminal records of ticketed motorists are being analyzed as part of this project.

(Conclusion)

Are these nighttime seatbelt promotional efforts worthwhile?

Before the news media summarily decided that all improvements in vehicle death data are solely attributable to increases in the cost of gas – the 2007 Washington State traffic death data showed good progress. There were 489 vehicle occupants killed in crashes in 2007, which was a 10% reduction from the previous ten-year average for those killed at night, and a 13% reduction for those killed during the day.

Need slide of this

A positive by-product of the nighttime seat belt project is that while they target unbuckled motorists with the intervention, they also are intercepting people who are unlicensed, uninsured, driving recklessly, negligently and impaired, and people who are involved in criminal activity.

We look forward to the results of the research from the project. Hopefully the numbers will continue to move in the right direction, showing reductions in serious injury and fatality collisions that can be attributed to thoughtful analysis of traffic data, strong program planning and implementation, and not just further increases in the price of gas.

How about adding a slide with “Preliminary thoughts based on the first year”

- **The crash data definitely support the need for nighttime belt efforts**
- **We don't yet know much about the characteristics of the unbelted days and night, but we will when we finish**
- **There are multiple ways to do night belt enforcement, and all seem to work well if implemented by dedicated law enforcement groups**
- **There are many side benefits to night belt enforcement that go beyond belts**
 - **Criminal**
 - **DUI**
 - **Drugs**

I would suggest that we do one slide for each of these main bullets with appropriate pictures if we have them.