

# Final Report

## Occupant Protection

### Enforcement Summit

May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009



*By Sreyoshi Chakraborty, Cheyenne MPO*



## **Background**

In 2008, the Cheyenne Metropolitan Planning Organization requested funding from WYDOT Highway Safety to organize a Summit for the benefit of the Law Enforcement Officers in the Cheyenne area. Wyoming has a low safety belt usage rate and lags behind most of the other states in US. Wyoming also does not have a primary seatbelt law. It has been seen that for states that do not have a primary seatbelt law, enforcement has been instrumental in increasing seatbelt use. Therefore, our goal through this project was to seek funding to support the Cheyenne Police Department, Laramie County Sheriff, Wyoming State Patrol and the MPO in their efforts to increase the use of safety belts in the greater Cheyenne area.

## **Problem Statement**

- In Wyoming, safety belts are used by 70 percent of residents, a rate that is below the national use rate of 82 percent in 2007.
- More than half (54 percent) of people who died in Cheyenne area crashes between 1987 and 2006 were not wearing safety belts. For some of these people, a safety belt could have saved their lives.
- One in five people injured in a Cheyenne area crash was unbelted. Some of these injuries could have been prevented or minimized if safety belts had been worn.
- Novice drivers and their passengers are more likely not to wear safety belts and be injured in a crash. Young vehicle occupants (age 16-20) represented 29 percent (600 of 2099) of the unbelted persons in injury crashes and 8 percent (4 of 53) of unbelted persons in fatal crashes in greater Cheyenne.
- One fifth of all people who died in a crash and who were not wearing a safety belt were between age 21 and 24 (11 of 53 unbelted deaths) in greater Cheyenne. Twelve percent (242 of 2099) of unbelted people in injury crashes were age 21 to 24. This age group has not fully developed decision making and judgment but is legally able to drink, so alcohol is often partially to blame for lack of safety belt use.
- Vehicle occupants over age 80 represented 11 percent (6 of 53) of unbelted persons in fatal crashes and one percent (15 of 2099) of unbelted persons in injury crashes in greater Cheyenne. Older persons are more likely not to wear safety belts because of comfort issues. Nevertheless, a safety belt helps reduce injury to older people who are more frail and vulnerable to injury.

## **Current Activities**

In Wyoming, a secondary safety belt law is in place, which means that motorist must be stopped for another infraction, such as expired license tag, in order to be ticketed for non-use of a safety belt. In

the absence of a primary safety belt law, which is being pursued, enforcement will be key to increasing the use of these devices that research has shown save lives and prevent injury. Anecdotal information indicates that some local law enforcement officers may erroneously believe that safety belt enforcement is the responsibility of the Wyoming State Police since the safety belt law is a state law. There needs to be a concerted effort to educate city and county law enforcement and to encourage them to increase their role in enforcing the safety belt law. While the absence of a primary safety belt law makes enforcement more problematic, other states have been successful in enforcing a secondary law, which has had a positive impact on safety belt use rates.

## **Proposed Activities with the Grant**

Funding will be used to do the following:

- Hold a half-day Law Enforcement Occupant Protection Summit in greater Cheyenne to which state, county, and local law enforcement personnel will be invited. At the Summit:
  - Present data on the extent of non-use of safety belts in greater Cheyenne.
  - Present data on the potential of safety belts to save lives and reduce injury.
  - Provide a forum for discussion among law enforcement personnel on tactics and best practices for enforcement of the secondary safety belt law.
- Conduct publicity activities to promote public awareness that enforcement of safety belt use will increase as a result of the Summit

Conduct media relations one or more months following the Summit on the increase in safety belt citations.

## **Evaluation Strategy**

The strategies proposed in this letter of intent are taken from the Cheyenne Transportation Safety Management Plan, which has established an overall goal of a ten percent reduction in all fatalities and serious injuries in the region by 2020. In order to achieve this goal, it will be necessary to increase the use of safety belts, which the MPO believes can be achieved through improved enforcement of safety belt use. The Cheyenne MPO and the law enforcement agencies will gather data for safety belt non-use citations prior to the Summit to establish a baseline. Following the Summit, law enforcement agencies will track the number of citations for safety belt nonuse in greater Cheyenne. Additionally, the Cheyenne MPO will track data on safety belt use by individuals in crashes before and after the Summit and the relationship to crash severity. The MPO will also

distribute a survey to all participants to obtain feedback on the meeting and whether individual officers increased their knowledge of safety belt issues.

## **Planning for the Summit**

The MPO received a grant in the amount of \$10,000 to organize a Summit to support the seatbelt enforcement activities of the Law Enforcement Officers in the Cheyenne area. The MPO coordinated with Cambridge Systematics Inc., to develop a subcontract between the MPO and Cambridge Systematics Inc. and approved by WYDOT. Cambridge Systematics' scope of work included helping the MPO to organize the Occupant Protection Enforcement Summit. Additionally, they also assisted the MPO in developing materials for media announcements with respect to the Summit. The MPO staff also started developing a draft program agenda and made contacts with Highway Patrol Office, Cheyenne PD and Laramie County Sheriff's Department to let them know of the upcoming Summit. Cambridge Systematics Inc. helped MPO staff finalize the agenda and identify potential speakers for the event. The MPO also coordinated extensively with WYDOT Highway Safety staff for updated data and other assistance with respect to the Summit. Contact was also made with the Laramie County Circuit Court and Cheyenne PD for data on seatbelt citations over the past few years. Little America was chosen as the venue for the event.

## **Summit Agenda and Speakers**

The Summit was a half day event. Some of the topics that were being covered in the Summit were as follows:

- Why is Safety Belt Enforcement important?
- How Does a Safety Belt Save Your Life? Busting the Myths
- Safety Belt Enforcement Case Studies - Successful Approaches
- WYDOT Highway Safety Program – Occupant Protection Resources and Programs
- Facilitated Group Discussion on Barriers and Opportunities to Enforcement

There was a diverse group of speakers who covered the topics listed above. The speakers



**Tom Mason, MPO Director, provides an overview on the importance of Safety Belt enforcement**

represented agencies such as the MPO, Cheyenne PD, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, Casper PD and the WYDOT Highway Safety Office. A detailed agenda with the names of speakers has been included under Appendix A.

There were Law Enforcement Officers who attended the Summit. The speakers provided a good overview of the issue of seatbelt use in the Cheyenne area. Additionally, successful case studies and programs were also key in setting up a good background for discussion on barriers and needs.



Pete Abrams from Casper PD talks about the CARTE Project

## Facilitated Group Discussion on Barriers and Needs

Facilitators asked the officers if they had been writing multiple tickets. A good majority of the officers indicated that they have written more than one ticket occasionally. The goal was to find out if the officers were indeed enforcing secondary law such as the Safety Belt Law in Wyoming.

Officers also indicated that generally they do not set goals on making occupant protection a priority. It is a decision that will be made by the department head often times. Prioritizing their time effectively while out in the field is always a challenge.



Facilitated Group Discussion at the Summit

### Barriers to effective enforcement:

- Equipment - Some of the officers are having issues with their equipment. Officers from the SO indicated that the radar system died after they had left the urbanized area. Officers are also having issues with the new system of online reporting. The online computer reporting has not worked very well. WYDOT Highway Safety Office representatives said that they are trying to resolve these issues. Since it is a new system, it will take a while to sort it out but should start running smoothly later this year.
- High fines for the tickets/multiple tickets - Some officers are hesitant because the fines for these tickets can turn out to be quite hefty, especially since it is tagged on to a primary offence. The total amount comes up to be high. Also, there is a significant amount of

paperwork involved with writing a seatbelt ticket. This is because of a Wyoming State law that requires each ticket to be written separately, i.e. you need to write a separate ticket for a secondary offence and you need to do complete paperwork for both the tickets that you have written.

- Inadequate Manpower – Lack of officers in the traffic department is a barrier to adequate enforcement.
- Time – Prioritizing time seems to be a challenge for most of the officers, especially with a lack of adequate number of officers to do enforcement.
- Knowledge and Specialization of Officers – This issue directly relates to lack of adequate manpower. Often times officers are not sure if their specialization/focus on the job is crime or traffic. Some of the officers just don't have enough knowledge to effectively enforce safety belt usage, i.e., they are often unaware that the safety restraint is not properly fastened and so on. They may also be unaware of pertinent state/local laws and regulations with respect to safety belt usage.

#### **Needs for effective enforcement in the future:**

- Targeted overtime enforcement, could be especially effective in the month of November? Experience has shown that targeted overtime enforcement really works.
- More training opportunities for the officers. Officer George Trammell from Cheyenne PD has been doing a significant amount of training himself with child safety restraints. Education at an academy is also missing in Wyoming currently.
- Reducing the amount of paperwork. This could be achieved through a number of ways:
- Get the legislators to pay attention to the issue of low seatbelt usage and fatalities related to it. Work with the legislature to either make seatbelt tickets a primary law or fix the rule of having to write multiple citations. This will lead to reduction in paperwork for the officers. Secondly, ensure that the computer systems start functioning properly so officers are not wasting 30-45 minutes filling out the online forms.
- Education/Media – Education efforts need to be boosted. The media can be a powerful tool in these kinds of education efforts. Pete Abrams from Casper PD emphasized the role of media and how it can be used to our advantage many times in his presentation on the CARTE project. Another example provided was the advertisements on methamphetamine usage in Wyoming and what harm it can do. Not only has it led to a significant reduction in usage after the ads went out, the legislature has been forced to address this issue proactively.



Officer George Trammell from Cheyenne PD talks about use of child safety restraints in Cheyenne

- Drivers Education – Mandatory drivers' education should be required by law with the involvement of enforcement officers who can do special training on safety belts. Data suggests that a significant number of young unbelted drivers. To drive home the point, education should start early. If you educate a young driver early, chances are that he will carry this lesson with him for the rest of his life and will also pass it on to his children.
- Manpower – Dedicate more manpower to the traffic department.

## **Conclusion**

The MPO believes that the organization of the Law Enforcement Summit provided a great opportunity to address some of the important issues that have been identified in the Safety Management Plan document. The discussion was productive and helped the MPO identify the barriers and needs for effective seatbelt enforcement in our community. The MPO did some follow up analysis on seatbelt citations for the May Mobilization month which happened right after the Summit. The results of that analysis are summarized in a 'press release' attached in the Appendix Section. The MPO will follow up on the challenges and needs identified in the discussion and work with the TSAC Committee in establishing specific action steps or programs which can be implemented in the future.

# Appendix

## Cheyenne Occupant Protection Enforcement Summit

Little America Hotel, Big Horn Room

May 13, 2009

### AGENDA

9 a.m.	Welcome and Introduction	Bob Fecht, Cheyenne Police Department
9:10	Why is Safety Belt Enforcement Important?	Tom Mason, Cheyenne MPO Mark Munari, Cheyenne Police Department
9:40	How Does a Safety Belt Save Your Life? Busting the Myths	Terry Dimon, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center
10:00	Safety Belt Enforcement Case Studies- Successful Approaches	George Trammel, Cheyenne PD Trooper Cross, Wyoming Highway Patrol
10:20	Break	
10:30	WYDOT Highway Safety Program - Occupant Protection Resources and Programs	Anna Thompson, WYDOT Highway Safety Program Stephanie Heitsch, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center Pete Abrams, Casper PD
11:15	Small Group Discussion	Facilitated groups
11:45	Lunch	
12:15	Group Discussion	Sreyoshi Chakraborty
12:45	Adjourn	



**Attendees:**

Mark Munari, Cheyenne PD

Robert Fecht, Cheyenne PD

George Trammell, Cheyenne PD

Rachel Johnke, Cheyenne PD

Jim Olsen, Cheyenne PD

Thomas Noonan, Cheyenne PD

Rob Bower, Cheyenne PD

John Earnshaw, Cheyenne PD

Lt. Yonti Allsop, Cheyenne PD

William H Clark, Laramie County Sheriff's Dept.

Andrew R. Pascoe, Laramie County Sheriff's Dept.

Tom Mason, MPO

James Sims, MPO

Terry Dimon, CRMC

Stephanie Heitsch, CRMC

Pete Abrams, Casper PD

Dalene Call, WYDOT

Stephanie Lucero, WYDOT

Anna Thompson, WYDOT

Sreyoshi Chakraborty, MPO

## Media Release

**Contact: Sreyoshi Chakraborty FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# Cheyenne MPO Encourages Drivers, Passengers To Wear Seat Belts

**CHEYENNE** – With the State of Wyoming seat belt usage at less than the national average, the Cheyenne Metropolitan Planning Organization is encouraging motorists and passengers to buckle up when getting in a vehicle.

Wyoming has the second lowest safety belt use rate in the country.

According to surveys conducted by the Wyoming Department of Transportation Highway Safety, just two thirds (68.6 percent) of Wyomingites were observed wearing seat belts in 2008, a decrease from 72.2 percent in 2007. Yet more than half of the people who die in vehicle crashes in Wyoming are not wearing seat belts. “Wearing a seat belt is the single most important thing people can do when they get into their vehicle to make sure they get home safely,” said Cheyenne Police Lt. Mark Munari. When lap/shoulder seat belts are used properly, they reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat occupants in passenger vehicles by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent.

In May 2009, the MPO held a Law Enforcement Occupant Protection Summit on the importance of seat belt use that involved the Cheyenne Police Department, Laramie County Sheriff’s Department, Wyoming Department of Transportation, and Wyoming Highway Patrol. The Summit addressed the injury outcomes of crash victims who do not wear seat belts, data on seat belt use in Wyoming, and strategies for increased enforcement.

The event was part of a program to implement strategies in the Cheyenne Transportation Safety Management Plan completed in 2008. “The Cheyenne MPO is working closely with Law Enforcement to improve transportation safety in the region,” said Tom Mason, Director of the Cheyenne MPO. Cheyenne Police issued more than 200 citations to drivers or their passengers between May 14 and July 6, 2009 because they were not wearing seat belts. This represents a significant increase compared to the same period in 2008 when Cheyenne Police issued 42 seat belt citations.

The higher number of seat belt citations is the result of an increased effort by the Cheyenne Metropolitan Planning Organization and Law Enforcement in greater Cheyenne to increase the safety of vehicle drivers and passengers.

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