

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION: BUCKLE UP PHONE DOWN CHALLENGE – ORGANIZATIONAL TRAFFIC SAFETY CULTURE

Traffic Safety Culture Case Study



CHANGING CULTURE THROUGH A CHALLENGE

More than 500 businesses and 12,500 individuals in Missouri have pledged to do their part in changing the state's highway safety culture through the Buckle Up Phone Down (BUPD) challenge.

The campaign tackles two of the most effective actions drivers can take to stay safe when getting behind the wheel – fastening their seat belts and putting down their cellphones.

Three years ago, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) observed negative trends in traffic safety. Specifically, the number of people killed in traffic crashes without wearing a seat belt and the increasing number of distracted driving crashes were concerning. In 2017, 64% of vehicle occupants killed in Missouri traffic crashes were unbuckled. Reported crashes involving cellphones had increased more than 35% since 2014, rising 11% in 2017 alone.

With limited policies to enforce (Missouri has no primary seat belt law and its no-texting law applies only to young drivers), MoDOT began to consider other options beyond statewide public policy that could help change the culture. During a team brainstorming meeting, the department decided to develop and promote a new behavioral awareness campaign that would highlight everyone's responsibility in creating a safe transportation system. Given the two concerns regarding seat belts and cellphones, the tagline "Buckle Up Phone Down" seemed to convey the simple, actionable message every Missourian could relate to. In addition, a hand gesture, logo and website were developed to brand the campaign, along with a viral video challenge circulated via social media.

Early on, MoDOT learned the challenge would be more effective and more sustainable with top-down support. MoDOT's Chief Engineer was instrumental in ensuring leadership throughout the organization was on board with the new campaign. Likewise, MoDOT was fortunate to have a director who strongly supported safety initiatives. He believed that if MoDOT was encouraging the public to take the BUPD pledge, the agency needed to be able to back that up with its own policies. He added a "no cellphone use while driving" policy to supplement the existing employee seat belt policy prohibiting MoDOT employees from using cellphones while driving (not even hands free is permitted). A bold move that created some concern from employees related to timely customer service, the new policy has proven to bring credibility to the campaign. More importantly, the new policy has created safer habits among MoDOT employees that not only impact their driving behavior at work, but that carry over into their personal lives.



With MoDOT's leadership on board and a new policy in place, it became easier to engage other managers in the department in the campaign. MoDOT leaders had direct conversations with managers to ensure everyone on the team was leading by example. This initial buy-in proved critical to spreading the message throughout the department and ensuring offices throughout the state were engaged. MoDOT's Highway Safety and Traffic Division took the lead on efforts to grow the campaign. Each district has its own BUPD champion who helps implement the program locally, both internally to the district office and externally to the surrounding communities.



The following process for developing safety culture summarizes a Safety Culture Workshop held jointly by the NCHRP 17-69 panel and AASHTO in October 2018.

Externally, MoDOT began engaging other state agencies in Missouri about BUPD and how they could get involved. Specifically, MoDOT challenged other state agencies to review their own safety policies and to consider taking steps to change the culture among their own employees. Eventually, the Missouri Office of Administration, which administers services for more than 50,000 state employees, joined the BUPD movement and altered their policies to promote safer driving habits among their employees.

The Governor's Office also joined the initiative. The MoDOT communications team reported on the success of the BUPD challenge during a meeting with other state public information officers and asked if the governor might be interested in supporting the cause by providing photos of himself doing the BUPD hand gesture. From there, the Governor's Office became involved in creating a BUPD proclamation and promoting BUPD challenge videos. The governor's wife has also spoken on behalf of the BUPD challenge.

At a local level, the district BUPD champions and the Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety helped organize and mobilize agencies and partners throughout the state to promote the BUPD message. The message was spread through a variety of channels including community events, school functions, collegiate activities, health and job fairs, professional sports teams, law enforcement agencies and local public policies or proclamations. Promotional items, paid media and even opportunities such as vehicle wraps have played a large role in making the message so visible. Regardless of the event or media format, the branding has been consistent throughout the state creating a recognizable message that easily translates to two simple actions for any recipient.



To maintain engagement internally, MoDOT organized monthly meetings between the Highway Safety and Traffic Division, the Communications Division and the district BUPD champions. Each district BUPD champion determines how to implement ideas locally and shares results with the rest of the group. The routine communication provides a forum for sharing ideas, encourages districts to try new things and keeps a strong momentum for the challenge.

MoDOT is now focusing on spreading the BUPD message outside of Missouri and into other states. Kentucky and Nebraska have adopted their own versions of the campaign, while Maryland has also implemented efforts focused on BUPD. MoDOT has had conversations with additional states, and AASHTO President, Director Patrick McKenna has reached out to his counterparts across the country encouraging them to adopt the campaign in their states. Likewise, MoDOT continues to engage external partners to explore opportunities for making the movement national.



Results

The early results are compelling. Since BUPD began in early 2017, seat belt use in Missouri has risen by 6.3%. Likewise, the number of cellphone-related crashes dropped in 2018 for the first time in the last five years. Missourians still aren't buckling up at the same rate as the rest of the country (87.7% compared to 90.7% nationally), but the gap is beginning to close. Likewise, the number of distracted driving crashes in Missouri is still too high. However, the momentum created by BUPD is a step in the right direction. Since the BUPD program kicked off a total of 65 municipalities have passed their own primary seat belt laws and 10 others have enacted distracted driving ordinances. The focus on individual responsibility in using the transportation system has the potential to create significant progress, especially if eventually coupled with strong public policy and enforcement.

How MoDOT Applied the Safety Culture Development Process to Organizational Safety Culture

1. Learn	2. Plan	3. Engage	4. Implement	5. Evaluate
<i>Sources cited</i>	<i>Strategies used</i>	<i>Stakeholders engaged</i>	<i>Tactics deployed</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crash data • Review of laws and policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involved leadership from the beginning* • Held ongoing cross-discipline meetings • Set new internal policies • Identified BUPD champions • Recruited partners by sharing successes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoDOT executive director • MoDOT chief engineer • MoDOT divisions and districts • State Office of Administration • Governor's Office • Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety • Mayors United for Progress • University of Missouri • Corporations, businesses and organizations • Individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee policies • Team of Champions • In-person meetings • Official Proclamation/ BUPD Day • Ongoing coordination meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat belt use • Number of cellphone-related crashes • Audience reach of program • Partners engaged • Individual pledges

*See *The TZD Business Case for Traffic Safety Culture* document for ideas on engaging leaders in safety culture initiatives

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