

# UTAH DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY: TOGETHER FOR LIFE – INCREASING SEAT BELT USE IN RURAL UTAH

## *Traffic Safety Culture Case Study*



### REDUCING RURAL RISK

More rural Utahns are wearing seat belts since the Utah Department of Public Safety's Highway Safety Office (Utah HSO) started the Together for Life Project in tandem with Utah's Primary Seat Belt Law.

Unfortunately, a leading cause of traffic-related death and serious injury in Utah is not wearing a seat belt. In the past 10 years, more than 30% of crash-related deaths in Utah have involved unrestrained occupants. Unrestrained occupants were 40 times more likely to be killed than restrained occupants when involved in a crash.

Most Utahns buckle up. In 2015, Utah's seat belt law became a primary enforcement law. By 2019, 90% of Utahns wore seat belts, a drastic improvement over the 18% of seat belt users in the 1980s. The increase in seat belt use is a strong example of improving traffic safety culture. Who, then, are the stubborn 10% not buckling up, and why?

In 2012, Utah HSO added several rural counties to its annual seat belt use survey after the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration updated survey criteria. Before the change, Utah HSO only reported on the six most urban counties in the state. Adding the rural counties highlighted a disparity between urban and rural rates of seat belt use.

### Comparison of Seat Belt Use

6 urban counties in 2011	17 counties (6 urban, 11 rural) in 2012
89.2% reported wearing a seat belt	81.9% reported wearing a seat belt

To understand the issue better, Utah HSO commissioned a study by Montana State University. The study showed that rural Utahns were three times less likely to use a seat belt than urban Utahns.

Additional studies of rural counties were completed between 2013 and 2016. The studies showed:

- Most adults agree it is important to protect themselves by wearing a seat belt.
- They strongly agree they want people they care about to always wear a seat belt.

In studying traffic safety culture, Utah HSO recognized the need for a different approach in rural counties. The Together for Life Project was designed to build on existing strengths and resources in Utah’s rural communities.

- Utah HSO worked with each rural county to identify a local champion to lead the project. Utah HSO has found that local leadership is essential for the project to succeed.
- A variety of stakeholders were invited to participate: leaders from law enforcement, traffic safety, local government, education and private business.
- The Utah Department of Public Safety, Click It Utah and Montana State University’s Center for Health and Safety Culture provided support.
- Stakeholders worked together to conduct a readiness assessment for each community. The surveys provided information on the attitudes and perceptions of citizens.
- Each county selected tools from a kit provided by Utah HSO. Messages were customized for each community. Each tool was intended to guide conversations about seat belt use and promote engagement on this issue. The tools were designed to achieve two goals:
  - Confront the seriousness of not wearing a seat belt; and
  - Build hope that communities can work together to reduce risk and create positive change.
- The tools included:
  - A website with content dedicated to each county, including information for local and state contacts.
  - Professionally produced video, radio, print and online advertising. Ads featured local business and community leaders or local statistics such as, “91% of Cache County adults supported the consistent enforcement of seat belt laws.”
  - Engagement cards to help adults start a discussion with someone on increasing their seat belt use.
  - Presentations and booklets for workplaces to establish seat belt policies.
  - School and student-specific presentations and media.



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.

Since Together for Life was implemented, seat belt use among the seven target counties has increased by an average of 19.8%.

Together for Life County	2012 Seat Belt Use Rate	2019 Seat Belt Use Rate	% Point Change
Box Elder	75.0%	90.6%	+15.6%
Cache	75.1%	91.6%	+16.5%
Carbon	57.3%	94.8%	+37.5%
San Juan	62.3%	81.7%	+19.4%
Sanpete	57.3%	81.8%	+24.5%
Sevier	73.2%	81.7%	+ 8.5%
Tooele	74.4%	91.5%	+17.1%
Statewide Average	81.9%	90.2%	+ 8.3%



**TOGETHER FOR LIFE**  
Cache

**Did you know?**

Utah crash data show that unrestrained crash occupants were over 30 times more likely to be killed than restrained crash occupants.<sup>1</sup>

Seat belts are the best protection.

**MOST** Cache County adults, 96%, want people they care about to always wear a seat belt.<sup>2</sup>

**MOST** Cache County adults, 81%, always wear their seat belts.<sup>2</sup>

**MOST** Cache County adults, 92%, agree it is the driver's responsibility to make sure others are wearing their seat belts.<sup>2</sup>

[www.togetherforlifeutah.org](http://www.togetherforlifeutah.org)

## How Utah HSO Applied the Safety Culture Development Process

1. Learn	2. Plan	3. Engage	4. Implement	5. Evaluate
<i>Sources cited</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual seat belt survey</li> <li>• Safety culture study</li> <li>• Public opinion and awareness surveys</li> </ul>	<i>Strategies used</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by a local champion</li> <li>• Conducted readiness assessment</li> <li>• Developed toolkit</li> <li>• Customized messaging for each community</li> </ul>	<i>Stakeholder engaged</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law enforcement</li> <li>• Traffic safety</li> <li>• Local government</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Businesses</li> </ul>	<i>Tactics deployed</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Engagement cards</li> <li>• School outreach</li> <li>• Business outreach</li> </ul>	<i>Measurement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual seat belt survey</li> </ul>

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### SOURCES

[togetherforlifeutah.org](http://togetherforlifeutah.org)

2012 seat belt survey <https://highwaysafety.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2016/01/2012UtahSeatBeltSurveyResults.pdf>

2018 seat belt survey <https://site.utah.gov/dps-highwaysafe/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/10/2018-seat-belt-survey-fact-sheet.pdf>

Data year by year, marking out change to 17-county study from 6 counties [https://ibis.health.utah.gov/ibisph-view/indicator/complete\\_profile/SeatBelt.html](https://ibis.health.utah.gov/ibisph-view/indicator/complete_profile/SeatBelt.html)

2019 report <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812875>

NHTSA national trends-seat belt publication <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/810962>