

INTRODUCTION

The only acceptable traffic safety goal is to reduce fatalities and serious injuries to zero. While significant improvements in traffic safety have been made, our shared vision of zero deaths and serious injuries on our nation's roadways is not fully realized. There is more work to be done.

A significant factor contributing to motor vehicle crashes is driver behavior. Risky driver behaviors include deliberate behaviors (i.e., behaviors that we choose to commit) like speeding, texting while driving, driving impaired, or not wearing a seat belt. These deliberate risky behaviors can be changed. Motor vehicle crashes and serious injuries are preventable, and our efforts must focus on changing behavior. Specifically, we must focus on creating conditions that increase safer deliberate behaviors.

The good news is that the majority of road users already engage in safe behaviors: most people wear a seat belt, most people do not drive within two hours of drinking alcohol or using cannabis, and most people do not speed (in excess of 10 mph over the posted speed).

A positive traffic safety culture already exists. Yet, not wearing a seat belt, impaired driving, and speeding are leading risky behaviors associated with fatal and serious injury crashes – even though it is a small portion of the population that engages in these behaviors.

The question that we must ask is: How do we leverage the large group of people already engaging in safe road user behaviors to influence the smaller group engaging in risky road user behaviors?

One way to leverage the positive road safety culture that already exists to impact the small group of road users engaging in risky behaviors is to grow proactive traffic safety.

WHAT IS PROACTIVE TRAFFIC SAFETY?

The roadway transportation system is a shared community that includes various users and stakeholders. For this system to meet everyone's needs and be sustained, all involved have an obligation to one another to act in ways that support the system.

At a basic level, individuals can meet this obligation by complying with existing laws and regulations. However, mere compliance with existing laws and regulations fails to address the myriad of situations that occur that are potentially unsafe but are not explicitly deemed unlawful. Furthermore, compliance means we accept the status quo (i.e., that over 37,000 people are killed every year) because it is the consequence of current laws.

To achieve higher levels of safety, individuals need to go beyond compliance to commitment – a commitment to safety for themselves and others. A commitment to safety means committing to avoiding risk as well as committing to taking actions to keep safe.

This commitment can be demonstrated by engaging in proactive traffic safety.

These proactive behaviors demonstrate a commitment to safety beyond oneself to include the safety of the broader transportation system.

Proactive traffic safety is proactive behaviors demonstrating commitment to a safe roadway transportation system.

EXAMPLES OF PROACTIVE TRAFFIC SAFETY INCLUDE...

- Supporting existing traffic safety efforts
- Staying informed of safety-related issues
- Planning a safe way to get home before drinking alcohol
- Speaking up about other people's unsafe behaviors like not wearing a seat belt or driving distracted
- Establishing family rules like always wearing a seat belt, never texting while driving, or never riding with someone who has been drinking alcohol
- Establishing a workplace policy like always wearing a seat belt in a company vehicle

WHY SHOULD WE GROW PROACTIVE TRAFFIC SAFETY?

Growing proactive traffic safety:

- Creates a shared commitment to safety
- Encourages proactive behaviors that support safety efforts
- Encourages proactive behaviors that extend beyond one's own safety to support the safety of others
- Expands the focus of safety efforts to include the large group of safe road users as a way to influence the small group engaging in risky behaviors
- Enhances existing Strategic Highway Safety Planning efforts

IMPLEMENTATION

Proactive traffic safety is a new opportunity to improve traffic safety. A primer is available to help traffic safety professionals grow proactive traffic safety (at the below URL). Additional tips to grow proactive traffic safety include:

Tip #1. Think in Terms of Allies and Partners

Consider:

- Who are my allies in promoting traffic safety?
- Who can help me introduce a new idea to other key stakeholders?
- With whom can I partner?
- Who has a direct stake in growing proactive traffic safety?

Tip #2. Engage Others about Proactive Traffic Safety

Tip #3. Grow a Shared Understanding of Proactive Traffic Safety

Tip #4. Think about Hosting a Meeting, Providing a Presentation, and/or Facilitating a Conversation about Proactive Traffic Safety

Tip #5. Use the Available Communication Tools

- Proactive Traffic Safety Primer
- Proactive Traffic Safety PowerPoint Presentation
- Conversation Guide

Tip #6. Integrate Proactive Traffic Safety into Existing Strategic Highway Safety Plans

Depending on your state's process, how you integrate proactive traffic safety into your Strategic Highway Safety Plan might look differently. Here are some ideas.

- Add a chapter on proactive traffic safety into your Strategic Highway Safety Plan.
- Develop principles of communication with proactive traffic safety in mind and add communication guidance as part of the plan.
- Identify strategies within the Strategic Highway Safety Plan that address high risk behaviors and consider augmenting these strategies with proactive traffic safety.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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