

Title: A model for community safety belt projects

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Abstract:

In 2001 in New Zealand, at least 29 people were killed whose lives could have been saved if they had used the seat belts available to them. Two were children. In New Zealand the child casualty rate remains high compared to other countries.

The wearing of safety belts is a priority area in the road safety arena for the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). The current national average for wearing rates for rear seat wearing and child restraint are substantially below New Zealand's National Road Safety Plan targets. An increase in safety behaviour i.e. the wearing of safety belts is highly likely to benefit ACC in terms of a reduction in the number and cost of injuries.

In 1999 the Injury Prevention Division of ACC developed a Community Safety Belt programme to provide communities with a model for implementing community based safety belt projects. The programme is now active throughout the country. A recent external review of the programme showed that the programme was successful overall in increasing wearing rates.

This paper outlines the development of the ACC Community Safety Belt programme.

Statistics

ACC data does not provide us with information specific to injuries resulting from failure to wear safety belts. So we rely on data from the Land Transport and Safety Authority (LTSA).

In 2001 at least 29 people were killed in New Zealand whose lives could have been saved if they had used the safety belts available to them. Two were children. Most crashes occur in 50 km/h areas and most often on short trips from home. In the event of a crash if people are not wearing a safety belt they could smash into the interior of the car or into other people in the car.

New Zealand law

The law says that all children under 5 years must be properly restrained in an approved child restraint suitable for their age and weight. A vehicle safety belt on its own is not enough. Children 5-7 years must use an appropriate child restraint if available. If no child restraint is available they must be restrained as securely as practical in the circumstances using any child restraint or safety belt

that is available. For children under the age of 15 where there are no child restraints or safety belts available, they must travel in the back seat. People 15 years or over must use a safety belt where a safety belt is fitted. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure anyone under the age of 15 is wearing a safety belt or approved child restraint.

Background

The wearing of safety belts is a priority area in the road safety arena for ACC, LTSA and the Police.

Increase in safety behaviour, i.e. the wearing of safety belts is highly likely to benefit the ACC in terms of reducing the number and cost of claims to ACC's Motor Vehicle Account. A recent cost benefit analysis undertaken for the Injury Prevention Division of ACC estimated an 8:1 ratio. This is a low cost with considerable benefit to ACC.

In 1999, the Injury Prevention Division of ACC developed a Community Safety Belt Programme to provide a model for implementing community based safety belt projects. The programme is now active throughout the country. A recent external review of the programme showed that the programme was meeting its objective of increasing wearing rates.

The programme involves a series of community projects which incorporate the following key project design principles:

1. Preparation and planning – includes pulling together all the relevant road safety partners, and determining targeting – in terms of restraint issue (adult safety belts general, adult front safety belts, adult back safety belts, child restraints), as well as geographical area, and population.
2. Baseline Evaluation
3. Direct Marketing
4. Promotion
5. Enforcement
6. Evaluation
7. Reporting

The programme recommends that local projects last no more than 12 weeks to give projects a high degree of focus.

The objective of the programme is to increase safety belt wearing rates within specific communities.

The national average wearing rates as at the end of 2001 were as follows:

	Nat average	Nat target
- Seat belts (adults): front	92%	98%
- Seat belts (adult): rear	70%	90%
- Children restrained (0-14): all	89%	98%

- Children restrained: front	95%	98%
- Children restrained: rear	87%	98%
- Child restraints used (0-4yrs)	82%	98%

The current national average of wearing rates for rear seat wearing and child restraint are substantially below the National Road Safety Plan targets.

If a current wearing rate for a restraint type in an area is well below the National Road Safety Plan targets above,¹ then that would strongly support activities targeting this area. If the current wearing rate for a restraint issue in an area was close to the national target then it would be difficult to make additional gains without a lot of substantial effort.

Depending on work previously done in an area, and the gap between the wearing rate and national average/target, it is sometimes more applicable to implement a maintenance type programme.

External review of the programme

The review looked at all projects carried out by ACC in the 2000/2001 year.

Findings:

- The average results indicated an overall increase across regions and safety belt types of 5%.

Issues that needed to be addressed:

- Different surveyors were used in each location and their training was different across regions as different people with varying degrees of experience and knowledge about traffic surveys, undertook the training;
- Different recording formats were used to collect the data;
- Some project surveyors counted cars while others counted numbers of people in cars;
- Sample sizes varied between projects and, at times, between baseline and evaluation surveys for the same site.

¹ Ratified by the New Zealand National Road Safety