Police Traffic Service Program - Problem Identification FY24 HSP

Distracted Driving Problem Identification

Distracted Driving is any activity that diverts a driver's attention from driving and increases the risk of crashing. Driver distractions include eating, drinking, grooming, taking photos, videos, or texting while using a wireless device, and any other action that takes a motorist's eyes or minds off the road.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported 3,142 fatalities due to distraction-related crashes across the US in 2020. Additionally, another 400,000 people are injured annually in distracted-related crashes. Distracted driving crashes are believed to be a lot higher due to unreported crashes, inaccurate witness statements, drivers not admitting cell phone use, difficulty obtaining cell phone records, cell phone logs not aligning with the exact time of a crash, or a crash involving another obvious charge such as speeding or alcohol impairment.

Utah crash data between 2017-2021 shows that 37% of distracted driving crashes were caused mainly by cell phone use, followed by other inside distractions at 24% and external distractions at 15%. Driver inattention is also noticeable in Utah's crash data which reflects that 65% of crashes were front to rear, 83% were straight ahead, and 39% of drivers were following too close.

In 2021, distracted driving crashes amounted to 5,484, claiming the lives of 11 people in Utah, with an additional 115 people seriously injured. Between 2017 and 2021, the number of fatalities in distracted driving crashes fluctuated, with an average of about 15 deaths yearly. Within those five years, there were 27,514 distracted driving crashes, resulting in 10,024 injury crashes and 83 deaths in 74 fatal crashes, including 11 pedestrian and 3 bicyclist fatalities.

Crash data identifies drivers ages 15-19 as involved in 29% of distracted driving crashes, more than any other age group. Teens are at higher risk of being involved in a collision involving distracted driving than adults due to key areas of the brain still developing, making it difficult for teens to manage potential distractions. An effective countermeasure for beginner drivers is to have Strong Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws. Data also reveals male drivers were involved in 76% of distracted-related crashes compared to female drivers at 63%.

It's important to identify most distracted driver crashes occurred on Fridays, and the highest percentage of fatal distracted driver crashes occurred on Fridays, followed by Saturdays and Tuesdays. Fatal crashes due to distracted driving are also most likely to happen in June and March, while September, August, and October show the highest number of crashes. Based on the latest crash data, most fatal crashes occur around 3:00 pm or 7:00 pm, and most drivers end their workday around this time.

The areas of the state with the highest number of distracted driving crashes between 2017- 2021 were Salt Lake, Utah, Davis, Weber, Washington, and Cache counties. Salt Lake County had the most distracted driver crashes, accounting for 41.5% of the distracted driver crashes in Utah. Most distracted driver

crashes occur where the posted speed limit is between 25 and 40 miles per hour and where the posted speed limit is 70 mph.

Law enforcement agencies experience challenges identifying distractions and their role in crashes they investigate; crash statistics may only partially capture the significance and extent of the problem. High Visibility Enforcement is one of the most effective deterrents for distracted driving enforcement but may require additional labor and other resources to achieve the best results. The need to address distracted driving has become critical, and education on the dangers will be explored through community events and efforts. The Highway Safety Office will continue to look at crash data, the potential for under-reporting, and behavioral surveys on driving behavior throughout the grant year.

Speeding Problem Identification

Speeding is one of the leading unsafe behaviors contributing to deaths on Utah's roadways and nationally. Since the pandemic, there has been a marked increase in speeding and other risky driving behaviors statewide, including speeds over 100 mph. Speeding and aggressive driving crashes not only affect the speeder but can also affect other drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

In 2020, the National Safety Council reported speeding was a factor in 29% of all traffic fatalities, killing 11,258 people nationally. In Utah, 43,524 speed-related crashes occurred between 2017 and 2021. Data indicates speed-related crashes increased by 23%, from 6,544 in 2020 to 8,095 in 2021. Between 2017 and 2021, 29% of all fatal crashes were speed-related, meaning 406 lives were lost or an average of 81 deaths occurred yearly. In 2021 alone, 91 speed-related fatal crashes resulted in 109 fatalities.

It's important to point out who is involved in most speed-related crashes. Over 76% of speed-related crashes involve male drivers. Also, younger drivers, ages 15-34, have the highest number of speed-related crashes, and drivers under 20 years of age are involved in over 27% of speed-related crashes. As the driver's age increases, the likelihood of being involved in a crash involving speed decreases.

Speed-related crashes were highest from December through January, generally due to drivers traveling too fast for conditions. While most fatal crashes occurred in May, followed by August, March, and November. Saturday holds the highest number of speed-related fatal crashes, at 18%.

Many areas of the state saw increased speeding, and urban regions exhibited higher speed-related fatal crashes than rural areas. Urban counties, including Salt Lake, Utah, Davis, Weber, Cache and Washington, incurred the highest total speed-related crashes. The counties with the highest speed-related fatal crash rates were Salt Lake, Utah, Weber, Washington, and Davis Counties.

Since the Coronavirus pandemic, Utah has seen a dramatic increase in drivers traveling at over 100 mph. The Utah Highway Patrol cited an average of 3,532 drivers for speeding over 100 mph in data from 2017-2019. The two-year citation average for 2021-2022 rose to 4,932, showing nearly a 40% increase.

The most effective countermeasures in reducing aggressive driving and speeding are speed limits (when enforced and obeyed), automated enforcement, not currently allowed in Utah, and communications and outreach coupled with enforcement. Community outreach, high visibility enforcement, and media will continue to be the most effective tool in reaching those most likely to speed in Utah.