
Wyoming Seat Belt Use Report



June 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of Wyoming's seat belt use study is to provide statistically reliable data from which generalizations, comparative analyses, and recommendations can be derived. The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) views this survey as a systematic tool to monitor the usage rate and to determine seat belt usage patterns within the state. The national Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) funded the study through WYDOT's Highway Safety Program (HSP).

The sampling methodology was first developed in 2006 and has been in use since that time. The consistent use of this methodology insures comparable data from year to year. The methodology utilizes a random probability sample of counties and sites within counties, as developed and approved by NHTSA. Observations were made at pre-selected sites, which were surveyed over the same days of the week and during the same time frames. Seat belt use was recorded for drivers and for front seat outboard passengers in automobiles, vans, sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and pickup trucks. The only major change in the surveys between 2006 and 2009 was the addition in 2008 of data collection on the type of roadway associated with each observation of seat belt use.

For this 2009 statewide survey, nine observers were dispatched from June 2 to June 6, 2009, to 207 intersections in nine Wyoming counties. The observers collected seat belt use data on the drivers of 22,535 vehicles and 3,351 outboard passengers in those vehicles, for a total of 25,886 vehicle occupants.

The final estimates of seat belt use for Wyoming in 2009 are as follows: 67.7 percent of drivers were observed as belted, and 66.6 percent of passengers were observed as belted, for a total seat belt usage rate of 67.6 percent belted for all observed vehicle occupants. In comparison to the results of the 2008 statewide survey in Wyoming, the 2009 rates are 0.4 percentage points lower for drivers and 5.3 percentage points lower for passengers, for an overall decline in seat belt use of 1.0 percent.

With a few exceptions, the results for 2009 are generally consistent with the findings in prior Wyoming surveys and are consistent with the patterns of seat belt use found in other substantially rural states.¹ Here are some of the general results, to be followed by detailed analysis in the rest of this report.

- Generally, seat belt use rates are higher for outboard passengers than for drivers, but this was not true for 2009 in Wyoming. The lower rate for passengers in this survey is most likely due to a particularly low rate of seat belt use by male passengers (55.7% belted).
- Seat belt use rates are higher in rural than in urban sites. This is a consistent result for each year of the Wyoming statewide surveys.
- The Seat belt usage rate varies considerably across the different counties, but some counties have consistently higher, and some lower, rates of seat belt use from year to year. Teton, Albany and Sheridan Counties usually have relatively higher rates, while Goshen, Natrona and Campbell Counties have relatively lower rates.
- Although seat belt use rates are higher on interstate roadways, there are relatively small differences in seat belt use across the three types of roadway (interstate, federal and state roadways).
- Women consistently have higher rates of seat belt use than men do in virtually all circumstances that are included in the survey.
- Seat belt use is highest in SUVs and vans, but there are fewer of these vehicles than there are of automobiles and pickup trucks. Occupants of automobiles were belted at a rate of 67.8 percent, close to the statewide average. For pickup trucks,

¹ For reference, the U.S. Census (2000) estimated Wyoming's population per square mile at 5.1 persons. The national average is 79.6 persons per square mile. In other words, there are nearly sixteen times more people per square mile in the U.S., on average, than are found in Wyoming.

the second most common vehicle type in Wyoming, the rate was particularly low at 61.8 percent.

- Generally, women have higher rates of seat belt use in every type of vehicle.
- Counties with high rates of seat belt use tend to have higher rates than other counties for all types of vehicles, and lower overall rates for some counties are reflected in relatively low rates of seat belt use across all vehicle types.
- In terms of seat belt use rates, it does not matter much whether data are collected on weekdays or the weekend.
- Occupants of out-of-state vehicles have consistently higher rates of seat belt use across all the variables included in the survey.

Finally, at the end of this report, there is a review of trends in seat belt use across the four statewide surveys completed between 2006 and 2009. While there has been some variation in the characteristics of the samples, the major finding has been the consistency of results across the years. The overall rate of seat belt use has gone up or down, but not on a year-to-year basis, and usually by no more than a few percent. As far as the rates for the major variables included in the study, there is more consistency than substantial variation.

In the remainder of this report, the reader will find a detailed discussion of the procedures and methodological guidelines used by DLN Consulting, Inc. to produce this study. Most of the report is given over to a discussion of the data analysis, including tables, graphs, and charts that are designed to make the results as transparent as possible.

In this narrative, the focus is on all of the occupants of the vehicles. One addition to this year's report is a separate appendix of tables that provides a breakdown by vehicle occupant, driver or passenger, for all of the major variables. The tables in the appendix also provide more detail, in general, than are found in this report narrative.

Seat Belt Use by County and Vehicle Type

The seat belt use rates for vehicle occupants by vehicle type are presented for each county in the following table.

Table 5

Percent Belted by County and Vehicle Type					
County	Auto	Van	SUV	Pickup	Total
Albany	79.4%	85.7%	84.2%	65.4%	76.3%
Campbell	57.9%	64.7%	56.5%	53.2%	56.1%
Goshen	65.5%	58.6%	71.0%	56.1%	62.6%
Laramie	66.4%	71.2%	73.4%	64.7%	67.8%
Natrona	62.1%	68.7%	70.4%	54.7%	62.2%
Park	70.1%	65.0%	76.4%	59.3%	67.2%
Sheridan	76.7%	83.4%	78.4%	66.8%	74.0%
Sweetwater	59.5%	68.5%	60.8%	74.7%	64.6%
Teton	96.9%	99.9%	99.1%	97.2%	98.2%
Statewide	67.8%	71.5%	73.7%	61.8%	67.6%

This detailed data is included here because it may be helpful to traffic safety professionals in the individual counties. However, it is important to be cautious about generalizations from this data, especially when there are very small numbers of vehicle occupants for some types of vehicles, especially vans, in counties with small sample sizes. In those cases, the standard errors are too high to be confident about the validity of the findings.

However, the general patterns tend to be consistent across the counties. In other words, the counties with higher rates of seat belt use also had higher rates across all the vehicle types, and lower rates in counties were reflected in lower rates across vehicle types. In most instances, the highest rates of seat belt use were found among SUV occupants, followed by van occupants, then occupants of automobiles. The lowest usage rates were for occupants of pickup trucks. The one county with an exceptional