

CHAPTER 1

Increasing Driver Safety Awareness

KEY TOPICS

- cultural change
- lifelong learning
- public service announcements
- responsibility

GOALS

- Encourage personal responsibility.
- Extend driver learning from one-time to lifelong.
- Enact legislation that requires or provides incentives for pursuing additional driver education.
- Promote highway safety awareness cultural change throughout Iowa.

BACKGROUND

Research indicates that approximately 85% of the causation factors associated with motor vehicle crashes are attributed to the driver. Many of these drivers are unaware of—or have underestimated the risks and consequences associated with—their unsafe driving behaviors. Driving is a complex set of tasks, but once learned, driving often becomes an “automatic” skill and critical thinking is not fully utilized by many experienced drivers.

Perhaps nothing will be more effective in dealing with this issue than having drivers accept their implied obligation to be “safety aware” individuals. However, to reach and maintain that profile takes more self-discipline than most individuals are motivated to use. Consequently, education, engineering, and enforcement efforts are needed for “encouragement.”

Most drivers probably know what good driver safety involves. For many, this knowledge and awareness were formalized through high school driver education or reading the *Iowa Driver’s Manual* in order to pass the written license test. For others, experience, discussion, and public awareness campaigns have been their “teachers.”

Unfortunately, driver *knowledge and awareness* are not always translated into appropriate driver *action*. Over the years vehicle features and operation have changed; roadway design, speeds, laws, and traffic control devices have changed; and drivers may not be motivated to drive safely.

1. Increasing Driver Safety Awareness

Driver safety awareness involves a range of topics and ever-changing safety factors that contribute to potential crashes or increase risk of injury. Drivers should know of and be prepared to deal with the following factors while driving:

- *Environmental factors*—weather, roadside hazards, work zones, traffic conditions, and other types of users.
- *Personal limitations*—fatigue, aging, reaction time, anger, and physical or mental conditions.
- *Driving behaviors*—drinking and driving, seat belt and child seat use, vehicle maintenance, aggressive driving, driving while distracted, disobeying traffic control devices, taking risks, and being inattentive.
- *Alternative transportation*—availability and access for impaired, fatigued, or elderly drivers.



NATIONWIDE

National Public Opinion

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) *Customer Satisfaction Survey* provided the following public opinion data:

- 95% believe that most crashes are caused by driver error, rather than vehicle failure (2%).
- 80% believe that the number of serious injuries in motor vehicle crashes could be reduced through more public education in areas from general driver education to reducing speeding and drinking and driving.
- Respondents also indicated strong support for driver education courses (89%), and most (73%) believed that the federal government should provide financial support to states and localities for that training.

IOWA

More vehicles and drivers use Iowa roads today, and driver behaviors and travel patterns have changed along with population demographics. As transportation evolves, experienced drivers —particularly older drivers— need additional education as new design and operation concepts, laws, vehicle designs, etc. emerge. Periodic required or voluntary driver improvement courses can impact driver knowledge and behaviors. Strategies to promote and implement driver self-improvement opportunities (in addition

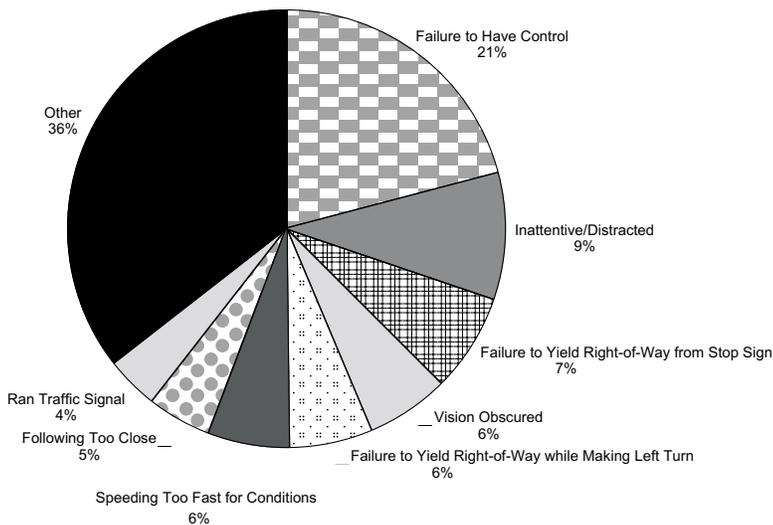
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to those designated for violators) should address both immediate and long-term demographics and safety benefits to Iowans.

In many states, officials are considering ways to continue driver awareness with mandatory testing every 12 years, or other ongoing driver awareness requirements. This is one of the many licensing issues addressed by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) that Iowa could consider implementing.

Iowa has had a long-standing dedication to safety on its highways. The Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), Iowa Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, Minnesota-Iowa AAA, Iowa Department of Education (driver education and school transportation), and other entities have addressed most of the issues related to driver safety awareness in some way. The Iowa Safety Management System (Iowa SMS) has helped enhance multi-agency and multidiscipline approaches to public awareness and education.

Iowa Driver Error Causes of Crashes (1990–1999)



Iowa Facts

See figure of driver error causes of crashes.

Iowa Public Opinion

Iowa SMS Public Opinion Survey

The 1999 Iowa SMS *Iowa Strategic Highway Safety Plan* included a number of potential strategies for dealing with these safety elements. The SMS public opinion survey asked over 1,000 Iowans whether they would support these strategies.

- Over 80% of respondents indicated the goal to “increase safety education for experienced drivers” should receive high or moderate emphasis over the next five years.

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POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Legislation, Policy, and Enforcement

- Review California and Minnesota's examples on driver's vehicle insurance discount legislation requiring mandatory premium discounts for drivers who take driving refresher courses.
- Evaluate current best practices and implement appropriate driver awareness and education strategies in Iowa (see Successes and Strategies Implemented section in this chapter).
- Consider forms of mandatory periodic driver education (e.g., view a video or use a computer-based instruction module and quiz when renewing a license.)
- Enact legislation that requires or provides incentives for pursuing additional driver education.
- Study the most effective public service announcement strategies and monitor what NHTSA reports in their current studies (see Successes and Strategies Implemented section in this chapter).



Education and Public Awareness

- Strengthen driver education programs and content to include emerging issues and changing roadway designs, including parental re-education related to graduated driver licensing (GDL).
- Develop a statewide multidiscipline coalition or communication network of transportation safety public awareness and education practitioners. Coordinate promotions in conjunction with agency programs and national annual events across agencies, disciplines, and government levels.
- Initiate providing updates on roadway and law changes to driver education programs.
- Provide short videos on new design and operation features for general public consumption at driver's license stations and through public service announcements.
- Pursue media opportunities to refresh adult drivers in print, radio, television, billboards, etc.
- Purchase time for public information and education initiatives.
- Evaluate current best practices on driver re-education used in other states.
- Evaluate immigrant and visitor language needs and provide appropriate materials (see Successes and Strategies Implemented section in this chapter).

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- Pursue insurance premium discounts for driver re-education efforts.
- Promote driver education materials to novice driver parents (parental re-education).
- Promote driver awareness of risks from all distractions—phones, maps, reading, eating, etc.
- Include risk statistics, injury consequences, and the economic impact of vehicle injuries and deaths in public awareness campaigns.
- Promote seasonal safety concerns such as agricultural vehicles at planting and harvest, back to school, and winter driving conditions.
- Collaborate with insurance companies to promote awareness of discounts for safety that may provide incentives for driver education, safe driving records, and vehicle safety features.

Design and Technology

- Re-educate drivers on emerging technology (e.g., pavement markings, antilock braking systems, intelligent transportation systems [ITS]).
- Establish a roadway safety “hotline” to report roadway hazards, damaged signs, etc.
- Encourage car sales businesses to include a complete review of vehicle features and practical technology explanations for car buyers with every sale.

Other Initiatives

- Coordinate transportation safety resources available from Iowa SMS, its member groups, and others.
- Collaborate on highway safety web page links etc. across agencies and disciplines.
- Collaborate on promoting various events and “safety weeks” statewide and throughout disciplines to increase the impact of such programs.
- Use slogans and other advertising techniques to enhance retention of safety messages (e.g., “are your holiday lights on?” for turn on your lights for holiday travel safety, “go with the flow” for speed suggestion, “peek a boo, I see you” for headlights in rain, snow, and fog conditions, and “do not veer for deer” for safe driving at animal crossings).

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SUCCESSSES AND STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED

- Iowa adopted GDL for novice drivers that enhances the educational experience for them.
- The Iowa DOT Office of Traffic and Safety sponsors the *Traffic and Safety Informational Series*. The goal of this project is to make available clear, concise, and consistent answers to 25 common traffic and safety questions. The information may be altered, distributed, and used by area officials and/or transportation professionals. It is available in print, on disk, and on the web.
- Iowa SMS approved funding in January 2001 for the Iowa DOT Office of Driver Services to create a young driver video for use in driver education classes.
- Iowa SMS approved funding in April 2001 for a statewide survey of local driver education programs to review such elements as tuition costs, curriculum and other resources used, etc.
- Iowa SMS approved funding in April 2001 for a study of effective public service announcements, *What Works*.
- The Iowa DOT provides driver's license services (manuals and testing) in Spanish and several other languages.



NOTE

The potential strategies in this chapter do not represent specific recommendations of the Iowa SMS Coordination Committee or any agency, group, or individual represented in Iowa SMS. The strategies represent a range of alternatives for legislators, department or agency directors, local governments, and citizen groups to consider when they elect to address a specific highway safety concern.

This toolbox is a living document that will continue to provide information, direction, and ideas for highway safety decision makers. Any strategies selected for implementation by Iowa SMS or any other entity will require further development through identifying potential partners, entities impacted, potential funding, steps for implementation, evaluation, and other pertinent tasks.

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RESOURCES

Information in this chapter is drawn from many individuals and sources. Known sources are listed here. **Contributors:** Daron Van Helden (primary), Denny Becker, Scott Falb, Jan Goldsmith, Jack Latterell, Craig Markley, , and Bob Thompson.

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators

www.aamva.net

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

Strategic Highway Safety Plan (Sept. 1997):

A comprehensive plan to substantially reduce vehicle-related fatalities and injuries on the nation's highways.

safetyplan.tamu.edu/plan/toc.asp

Iowa Department of Transportation Office of Driver Services

www.dot.state.ia.us/mvd/ods

Iowa Driver's Manual

www.dot.state.ia.us/mvd/ods/dlmanual.htm

Iowa Department of Transportation Office of Traffic and Safety

Traffic and Safety Informational Series:

<http://www.ctre.iastate.edu/pubs/tsinfo/index.htm>

Iowa Safety Management System

www.iowaSMS.org

Iowa Strategic Highway Safety Plan (Aug. 1999):

www.iowasms.org/pdfs/ishsp.pdf

Iowa Strategic Highway Safety Plan Goals and Strategies: Statewide Survey of Adults (Oct. 2000):

www.iowasms.org/pdfs/publicopinionsurveyexecsumm.pdf

Minnesota-Iowa AAA

www.aaa.com/scripts/WebObjects.dll/AAAOnline?association=aaa&club=049

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

www.nhtsa.dot.gov

NHTSA Facts (Summer 1996)

Customer Satisfaction Survey (1997)

Insurance Discounts: Traffic Safety Tips

Traffic Tech, NHTSA Technology Transfer Series No. 200 (May 1999):

www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/outreach/traftech/pub/tt200.html