



Spotter Patrols and Distracted Driving

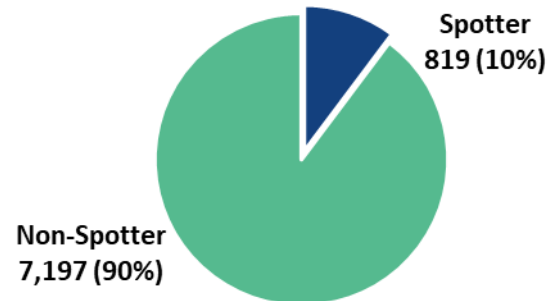
Distracted driving is a persistent issue on Washington roads—one that has cost 274 lives since 2023. April is national Distracted Driving Awareness Month where increased law enforcement and media campaigns remind drivers to put distractions away and focus on the road while driving.

Law enforcement officers use High-Visibility Enforcement (HVE) to deter distracted driving and change unlawful traffic behavior. An HVE patrol is a period of time when officers conduct traffic stops for certain violations. One HVE strategy involves the use of a spotter patrol. A spotter patrol consists of a spotter and several enforcement units staged a short distance from the spotter's location. The spotter positions themselves at a location where they can observe passing vehicles for distracted driving violations. The spotter calls out violations to the enforcement units who then stop the distracted driver.

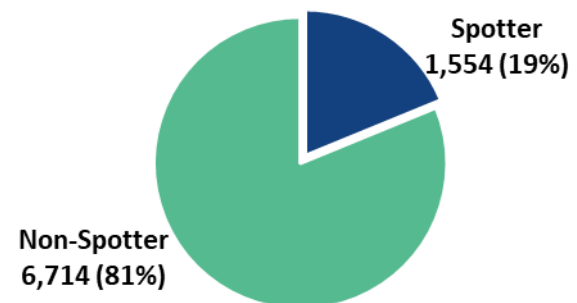
From January 1, 2023 to May 31, 2025, there were 1,556 distracted driving HVE patrols conducted throughout Washington, resulting in 8,268 warnings and infractions. Of these patrols, 11 percent (n=166) employed a spotter and 89 percent (n=1,390) did not.



Distracted Driving Patrol Hours by Spotter Type, 01/2023-05/2025



Distracted Driving Warnings and Infractions by Spotter Type, 01/2023-05/2025



Did you know?

- ⇒ Spotter patrols can result in higher levels of observed violations.
- ⇒ Although spotter patrols accounted for one-tenth of all distracted driving HVE patrol hours, they accounted for nearly one-fifth of all distracted driving warnings and infractions.
- ⇒ The average hours per patrol were slightly lower among distracted driving HVE patrols using a spotter (4.9) compared to those that did not use a spotter (5.2).
- ⇒ Spotter patrols yielded more distracted driving warnings and infractions per hour compared to non-spotter patrols.

Data Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission High-Visibility Enforcement (HVE) Activity Logs

Spotter Patrol Training: <https://vimeo.com/944955734>

For more information, please contact (360) 725-9860. <https://wtsc.wa.gov/research-data/>



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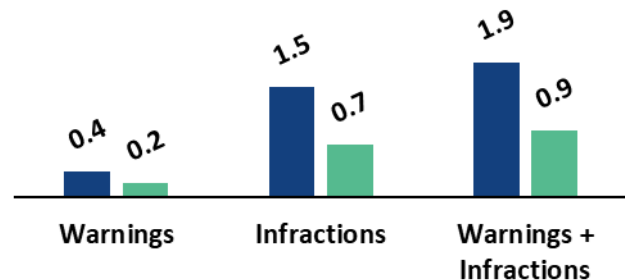
Spotter patrols for distracted driving yielded an average of 1.9 warnings and infractions per hour compared to 0.9 per hour amongst non-spotter patrols. Spotter patrols averaged about 9.4 distracted driving warnings and infractions per patrol compared to an average of 4.8 among non-spotter patrols.

Distracted driving HVE patrols using a spotter resulted in 2.5 contacts per hour while non-spotter patrols resulted in 2.3 contacts per hour. Among spotter patrols, 14% of contacts resulted in a distracted driving warning and 61% resulted in a distracted driving infraction. Among non-spotter patrols, 9% of contacts resulted in a distracted driving warning and 32% resulted in a distracted driving infraction. Other non-distraction warnings and/or infractions may have been given.

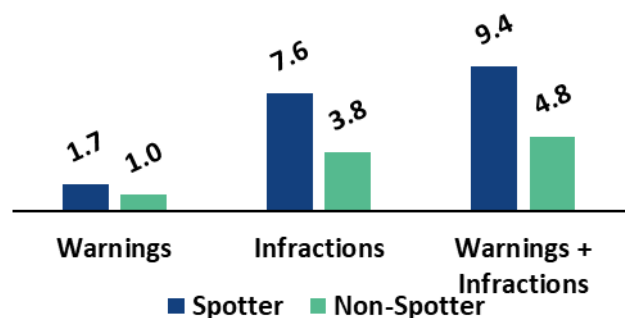
Among distracted driving non-spotter HVE patrols that recorded zero distracted driving warnings and infractions, speed warnings and infractions were most frequent. About one-quarter of distracted driving non-spotter patrols recorded zero distracted driving warnings and infractions compared to six percent of distracted driving HVE patrols using a spotter.

About one in four distracted driving non-spotter patrols recorded zero distracted driving warnings and infractions compared to one in seventeen spotter patrols

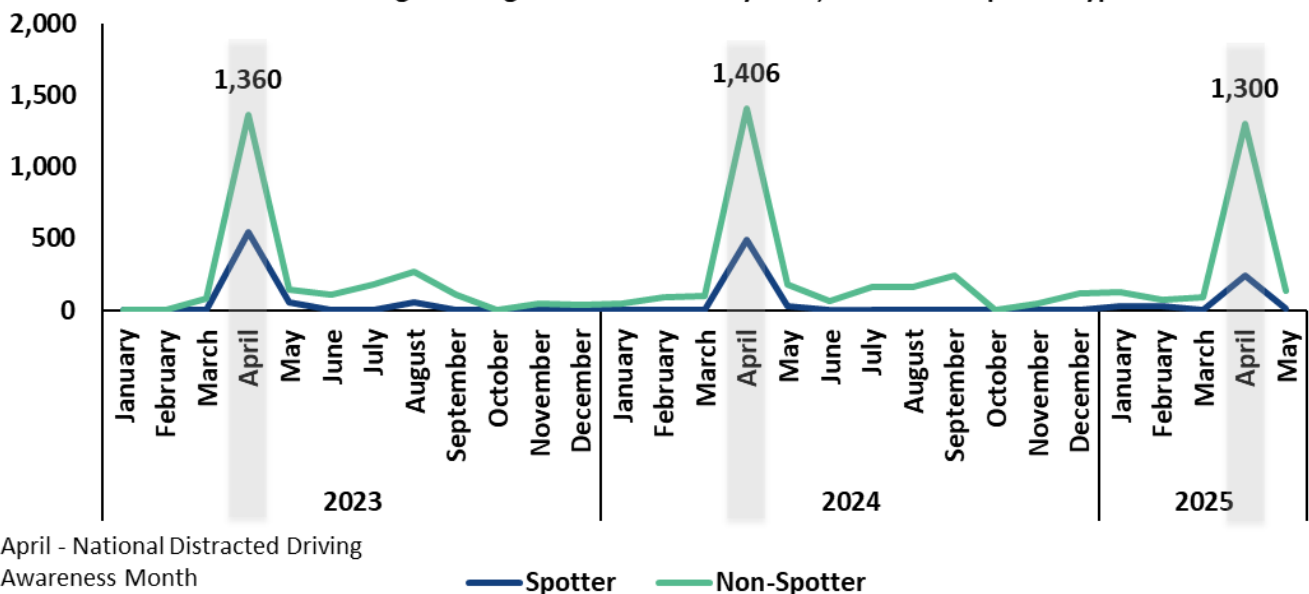
Average Distracted Driving Warnings and Infractions per Hour by Spotter Type



Average Distracted Driving Warnings and Infractions per Patrol by Spotter Type



Distracted Driving Warnings and Infractions by Year, Month and Spotter Type



Note: Spotter patrol requirement for Washington Traffic Safety Commission-funded HVE patrols dropped in 2021.