



Spotter Patrols and Seat Belt Use

Not wearing a seat belt is a risky behavior and can increase the chance of serious injury or death in the event of a crash. Since 2023, there have been 313 unbelted vehicle occupant fatalities in Washington. May is when the national 'Click It or Ticket' campaign occurs, where increased law enforcement and media campaigns remind drivers to buckle up and use their seat belt when traveling in a vehicle.

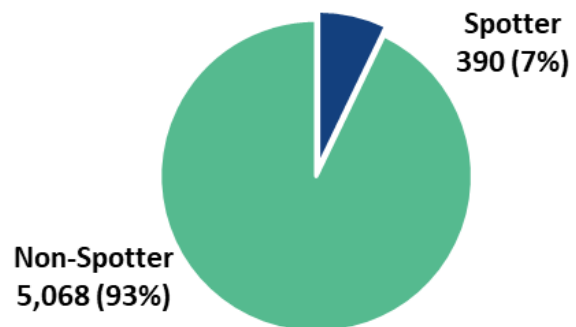
Law enforcement officers use High-Visibility Enforcement (HVE) to promote seat belt compliance and change unlawful traffic behavior. An HVE patrol is a period of time when officers conduct traffic stops for certain violations. One HVE strategy involves the use of a spotter patrol. A spotter patrol consists 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 seat belt violations. The spotter calls out violations to the enforcement units who then stop the vehicle with unbelted occupants.

Did you know?

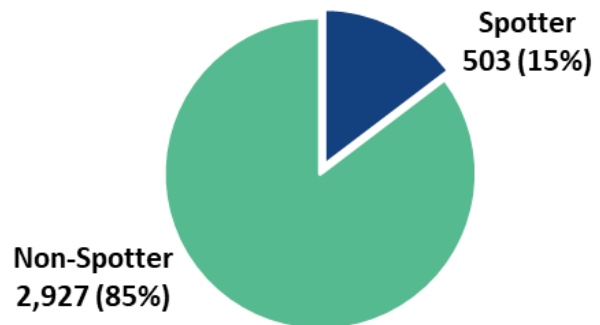
- ⇒ Spotter patrols can result in higher levels of observed violations.
- ⇒ Although spotter patrols accounted for seven percent of all seat belt HVE patrol hours, they accounted for nearly one in six seat belt warnings and infractions.
- ⇒ The average hours per patrol were slightly lower among seat belt HVE patrols using a spotter (4.7) compared to those that did not use a spotter (5.3).
- ⇒ Spotter patrols yielded twice as many seat belt warnings and infractions per hour compared to non-spotter patrols.

From January 1, 2023 to May 31, 2025, there were 1,047 seat belt HVE patrols conducted throughout Washington, resulting in 3,430 warnings and infractions. Of these patrols, eight percent (n=83) employed a spotter and 92 percent (n=964) did not.

**Seat Belt Patrol Hours by
Spotter Type, 01/2023-05/2025**



**Seat Belt Warnings and Infractions by Spotter
Type, 01/2023-05/2025**



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/>



Spotter Patrols and Seat Belt Use

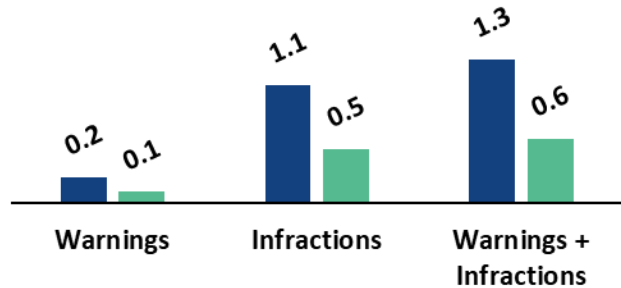
Spotter patrols for seat belt use yielded an average of 1.3 warnings and infractions per hour compared to 0.6 per hour amongst non-spotter patrols. Spotter patrols averaged about 6.1 seat belt warnings and infractions per patrol—twice that of non-spotter patrols which averaged 3.0 seat belt warnings and infractions per patrol.

Seat belt HVE patrols using a spotter resulted in 2.7 contacts per hour while non-spotter patrols resulted in 2.3 contacts per hour. Among spotter patrols, eight percent of contacts resulted in a seat belt warning and 39 percent resulted in a seat belt infraction. Among non-spotter patrols, four percent of contacts resulted in a seat belt warning and 21 percent resulted in a seat belt infraction. Other non-seat belt warnings and/or infractions may have been given.

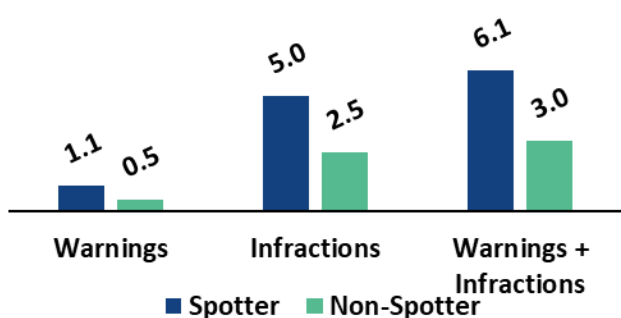
Among seat belt non-spotter HVE patrols that recorded zero seat belt warnings and infractions, speeding warnings and infractions were most frequent. One in three seat belt non-spotter patrols recorded zero seat belt warnings and infractions compared to about one in ten seat belt HVE patrols using a spotter.

One in three seat belt non-spotter patrols recorded zero seat belt warnings and infractions compared to about one in ten spotter patrols.

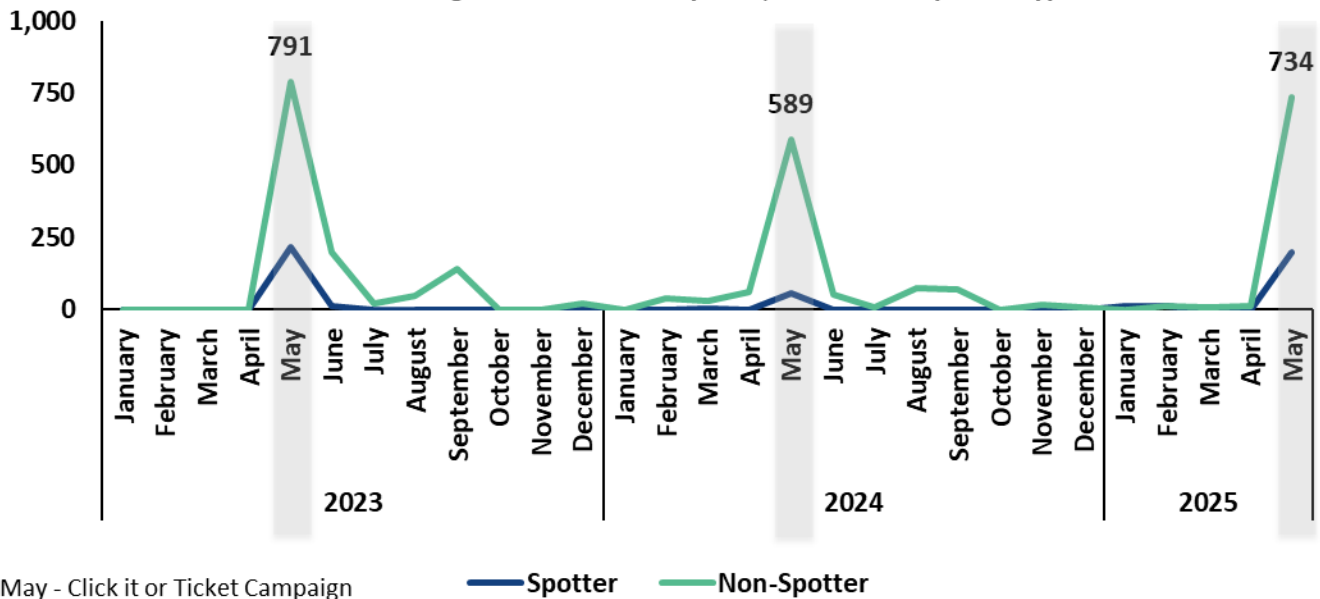
Average Seat Belt Warnings and Infractions per Hour by Spotter Type



Average Seat Belt Warnings and Infractions per Patrol by Spotter Type



Seat Belt Warnings and Infractions by Year, Month and Spotter Type



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