

Traffic Safety Is No Accident



An overview of the
programs and grant
funded projects of the
Washington Traffic
Safety Commission

Washington Traffic Safety Commission
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What is the Washington Traffic Safety Commission?

The Washington Traffic Safety Commission came into existence in 1967. At that time, the number of deaths and serious injuries from roadway collisions throughout the country was very high. The ever increasing popularity of automobile travel — in the absence of any full scale effort to hold down the collision rate — caused the nation's roadway death toll to soar. Recognizing the urgency of the problem, Congress took action by passing the National Highway Safety Act. The Act dedicated a portion of federal gas tax revenue to fund traffic safety efforts at the state level. To obtain about \$2.5 million yearly in federal highway safety money, a state match of about \$215,000 is required.

The Structure Of The Washington Traffic Safety Commission

There are 16 people who work for the Commission. The staff is headed by a Director, as well as a Commission which, similar to a Board of Directors, gives policy guidance to the Director and staff. The Commission is chaired by the Governor and includes six state agency directors, as well as representatives from the courts and local government.

Commission members include:

- * The Superintendent of Public Instruction
- * The Director of the Department of Licensing
- * The Secretary of the Department of Health
- * The Secretary of the Department of Transportation
- * The Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services
- * The Chief of the Washington State Patrol
- * A representative of the Association of Washington Cities
- * A representative of the Washington Association of Counties
- * A representative of the Judiciary.

Commission Grant Funded Projects:

Grant Money Available For Local Law Enforcement

This year over \$550,000 in Commission grant money is being used by law enforcement agencies to pay for extra manpower to increase drunk driving patrols, provide training for law enforcement and other traffic safety efforts. Research in other states has proven that the combination of public education, as well as stepped up enforcement are the two key components in a powerful formula that gets results. When people hear a message from their local sheriff, police officer or trooper, and when they believe that there is a good possibility that they will get a ticket, behavior changes result. The two key components are enforcement and public education. To add the extra enforcement, the Commission pays for over-time costs. To get the word out, the Commission provides materials and training.

PBT's, Radar guns and Training

Law enforcement grant money from the Commission is also used to purchase portable breath testing equipment so that the officers can test drinking drivers when they pull them over. Also, radar units can be purchased to track speeders. Training in the dynamics of reconstructing a crash scene or testing drunk drivers at the scene (called field sobriety tests) is also paid for by the Commission.

Supporting People Who Are Already Working On Traffic Safety

There are many state and local government employees, and members of civic and non-profit organizations who work to improve roadway safety in Washington State, including:

- * Police, sheriff and State Patrol officers — whether the effort involves public outreach or stepped up enforcement to catch law violators,
- * City, county and state road engineers. The design of roadways and road signs can cause or prevent collisions.
- * State and local emergency medical service (ambulance) and hospital personnel. Their response time to collisions can mean the difference between life and death for victims of collisions. Many of them do public outreach work.
- * Teachers in areas such as driver education and health education. High school and college students are in a disproportionately high number of collisions.
- * People who work for local government agencies who promote traffic safety.
- * People who treat alcoholics and drug abusers. It is estimated that 10% of our population is alcoholic, drug addicted or both. Drinking drivers are responsible for 40% of the fatal collisions in Washington.
- * Volunteers with groups such as Mother Against Drunk Drivers (MADD), Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), Stop Auto Fatalities Through Youth Efforts (SAFTYE), Washington Traffic Safety Representatives, Washington Seatbelt Spokespersons, the Washington Association of Women's Highway Safety Leaders, the Washington Substance Abuse Coalition, and drug and alcohol education coordinators at Washington military bases.

The Commission supports this vast network of traffic safety proponents with programs, training, educational materials, grants and an important communication link



Students from North Central High School, State Representative Lisa Brown from Spokane, the Washington State Patrol, the Spokane Police Department, KKZX Radio Station, the group Citizens Against Alcohol Related Traffic Accidents, the Wendle Ford Nissan Isuzu Automobile Dealership, the Safety Restraint Coalition and the Washington Traffic Safety Commission participated in a promotional event to support seatbelt users.

Anti-Drunk Driving Talks By EMS Staff

Using a \$5000 grant from the Commission, the Department of Health Emergency Medical System coordinators developed two educational videos (one targets the teen audience, the second is aimed at adults) which emphasize the need to drive sober. EMS education/outreach staff across the state have used the videos in talks to over 400 civic and educational groups. They've reached over 27,000 people with this important message.

More Examples Of Projects Supported By Commission Grants:

More Drinking Driver Convictions -- Low Law Enforcement Costs

A pilot project in Pierce County was so successful in reducing law enforcement costs that efforts are underway to expand it statewide. It's called the Law Enforcement/Court Scheduling project. When the project began there was a large backlog of cases in the Pierce County court and law enforcement officers were being scheduled to appear in more than one courtroom at a time. Hearings were often rescheduled. Defense attorneys used the system to obtain plea agreements and avoid drunk driving convictions. A new computerized court scheduling system developed with a grant from the Commission is able to input the schedules of officers, judges and prosecutors. When the clerk sets a court date, he views the three schedules at once and picks a time when the officer is already on shift. Officers are scheduled for more than one trial in a day to make the best use of their time. The savings in officer overtime are dramatic. With the State Patrol overtime costs shaved by \$2000 per courtroom, the expansion of this project statewide is expected to save law enforcement agencies at least \$200,000 a year.



A statewide training of courtroom and other judicial personnel on the topic of a complex new drunk driving law was organized and funded by the Commission with help from a committee of professionals from the many areas affected by the law. Timely and organized implementation of the new law was the goal and the result.

Getting Drug Free Dances Off The Ground

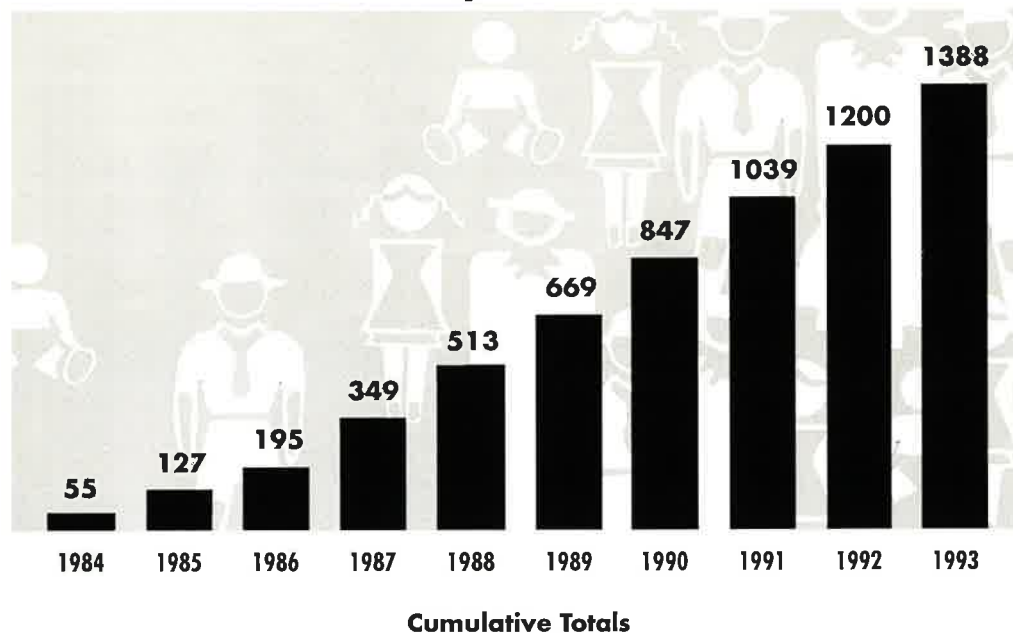
In areas such as Shelton, Washington, grants of up to \$500 are used by high school traffic safety groups to sponsor drug-free dances. At the dances, the student traffic safety advocates conduct fund raising activities for their clubs to finance future dances.

How Fast Are You Driving? In Clark County, a radar reader board purchased by a task force which includes local government and citizens is being used to get people to voluntarily reduce their driving speeds. The radar reader board was purchased with a \$2000 grant from the Commission. Similar equipment was purchased for use in Puyallup, Bremerton and Bothell.

Bainbridge Island Bike Helmets

Just a ferry ride across Puget Sound from downtown Seattle lies Bainbridge Island where a group of bicycle safety advocates used a \$1,700 grant from the Traffic Safety Commission to drum up \$23,000 in donations from businesses. The result is a project where over 2,500 bicycle helmets were purchased and distributed to low-income kids. In addition, they've been conducting educational programs to help the children and their parents understand that bike helmets prevent serious injuries, like brain injuries. In 1993, there were 417 bike riders between the ages of 10 and 14 injured and another two killed. In fact, the number of bike riders injured and killed in Washington has been on a steady increase — up over 20% since 1989. Between 1989 and 1993 there were 7,166 bicyclists injured and 44 riders killed.

Estimated Lives Saved by Seatbelt Use



Child Car Seat Education

Commission grant funding supports the Safety Restraint Coalition, a non-profit organization that educates parents about the correct use of child car seats. Because of the large number of child car seats, coupled with the huge selection of makes and models of cars, there is a high rate of error among parents who use child car seats. Loosely buckled seats, or buckles positioned incorrectly on the front side of the baby — these kinds of errors can result in the death of a child. Distributing educational materials through local health clinics and day care centers, sponsoring child car seat educational clinics and distributing child car seats to low-income families — this is just some of the work done by the Safety Restraint Coalition. They also staff a 1-800 line for parents who have questions. That number is 1-800-BUCK-L-UP.

At WSU: Designated Driver Research

Can the number of designated drivers in a tavern be increased? In 1993, the Psychology Department at WSU determined that the number of designated drivers in a tavern can in fact be increased by advertisements on tables (the cards on tables are called "table toppers") and through the use of posters. In addition the tavern or cocktail lounge must agree to offer more than just coffee and pop to the designated drivers. The combination of advertising inside the bar and the better drinks offered designated drivers (non-alcoholic beers, non-alcoholic ice cream drinks, etc.) are the two key components to increasing the number of designated drivers in a tavern, the research found. Now, a follow-up study being paid for by the Commission will test the impact of radio and newspaper ads to increase the number of designated drivers in a tavern.

Drinking is a deeply entrenched part of the ritualized rite of passage for many young adults, especially men, who are the largest segment of the drinking driver group. Generally, there are between one and three designated drivers (people who agree to stay sober and drive the drinkers home) in a group of about 200 drinkers. Designated drivers not only protect their group of drinkers — they usually take about four drinkers with them to the bar — they also protect other drivers on the road. Hence, increasing the number of designated drivers in taverns, cocktail lounges and at private parties could reduce the carnage caused by drinking drivers.

Projects Managed By Commission Staff:

The Corridor Safety Program

Collisions occur on all roadways in the state, but on some roads the collision rate is particularly high. A project which was developed by the Commission has proven effective in reducing the collision rates on these problem roadways. It's called the Corridor Safety Program. First, a steering committee is formed. It includes representatives from government agencies that have a stake in improving the collision rate on that roadway (examples: state and local engineers, law enforcement officers, school and transit officials, and emergency medical personnel), as well as other people who can help with the effort (political representatives, business people and members of the media -- to name just a few). The first job of the steering committee is to examine — with research provided by the Traffic Safety Commission and the Department of Transportation — why collisions are occurring on that roadway. Some of the traffic safety problems identified have included drunk driving, speeding, congestion, and road signs that are confusing. Once they have a detailed list of the problems, they put together and carry out a plan to reduce the collision rates. It's a simple process and it works.

Corridor Statistics:	State Route 9 (northeast of Everett)	State Route 290 (East Trent in Spokane)
Fatalities	down 33%	down 23%
Serious Injuries	down 29%	down 41%
Drunk Driving	down 35%	down 12%
Seatbelt Use	up 22%	up 17%

The Fatal Team

The Fatal Collision Investigations Team, managed by the Commission, is probably the best team of accident reconstruction specialists in the world. Through the use of physics, engineering, and forensic pathology, team members are able to determine what series of events led to a particular crash. The group focuses on research and training of law enforcement officers so that the officers do not have to rely solely on eye witness reports to determine what caused a crash. Eye witness reports are often inaccurate. In existence since 1987, the team consists of ten investigators — accident reconstructionists from the fields of engineering, police and medicine — who volunteer their time and expertise to study specific crashes and trends in Washington State collisions. Their work has led to improved collision investigations by law enforcement and they have shed light on such questions as: Why do people who wear seatbelts die in vehicle collisions? They've also studied the impact that small quantities of alcohol can have in causing fatal crashes, as well as pedestrian fatalities.

Messages In The Media

Through the work of a public information officer, the Commission is able to keep traffic safety messages in the media. Television public service announcements are carried on cable networks across the state and run on prime networks during peak viewer periods throughout the month -- at no cost to the public. Other messages run in daily and weekly newspapers are called ad slicks. These look like paid advertisements but are actually used by the media to fill vacant space. Promotional events, press conferences, and regularly distributed press releases are also effective in keeping traffic safety messages in the public eye.

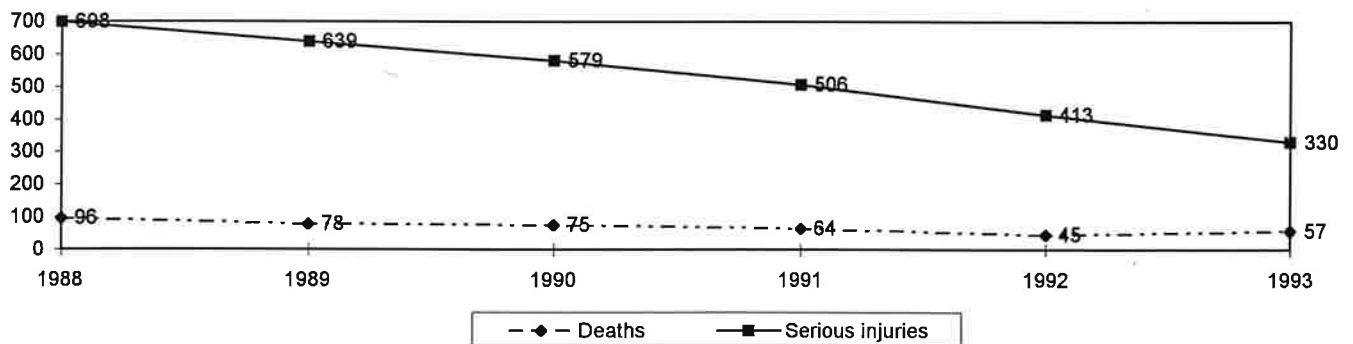
Youth Outreach

An annual conference for traffic safety youth groups takes place at Camp Casey on Whidbey Island each spring.



The Traffic Safety Commission provides staff and material support for a network of over 200 teenage youth groups called SAFTYE and SADD Clubs which promote traffic safety among this state's high schools. The clubs coordinate activities aimed at educating students about traffic safety issues such as drinking and driving and seatbelt use, as well as promoting drug-free lifestyles among youth. SAFETY stands for **Stop Auto Fatalities Through Youth Efforts**. SADD stands for **Students Against Drunk Driving**. The clubs have a 24-member Student Advisory Board with elected representatives from 11 state regions. This network sponsors nine regional meetings and a youth conference in the Spring. The objective of the clubs is to cut the collision rate among teens, particularly important given that traffic collisions are the leading cause of death among 16 to 21-year-olds. Research shows that drinking among teens is a huge problem, yet drinking and driving among teens has been on the decline in Washington State. A 1990 Gallup poll determined that, of the teens surveyed nationally, 41% said that they believe at least one of their friends has a serious drinking problem. Drinking by high school students was listed as the biggest problem facing the schools, in the opinion of the National Association of High School Student Government Leaders. Yet the drunk driving collision rate among Washington teens has dropped 24% since 1989. High school students in this state are doing a much better job of curtailing their drinking and driving than older, legal drinkers.

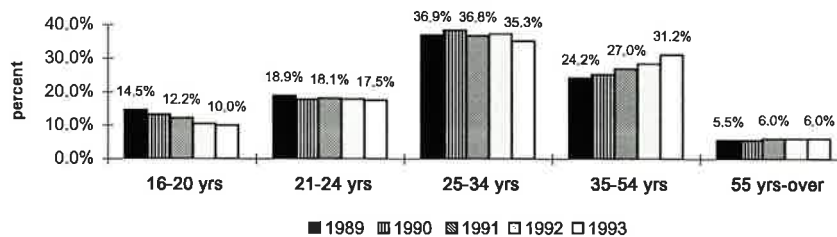
Drinking Driver Collisions Involving Young People



Efforts To Reduce Drinking Driver Collisions

There are numerous people whose work brings them in contact with drinking drivers. They include alcoholism and drug counselors, health and drug education teachers, corrections officers, defense and prosecuting attorneys, judges, law enforcement officers, and Liquor Control Board staff — among others. One important function of the Commission's Alcohol Program is to help these people share information. The Commission hosts a yearly conference where problems and innovative approaches are discussed. A committee with representatives from all of these work areas meets quarterly at the Commission to discuss issues, the impact of laws and projects aimed at reducing the problems caused by drinking and drugged drivers. Commission grants support programs operated by local and state governments, law enforcement officers and civic organizations across the state which attack the drinking driver problem.

**Percent of total alcohol-related collisions by age group
Five-year trend**



Seatbelts Save Lives

In addition to the grant funded child car seat education efforts by the non-profit Safety Restraint Coalition, the Commission has a number of seatbelt promotional efforts underway. Among the most successful projects is one which combines stepped up law enforcement with public education activities. Managed by the Commission, the project — called the Three Flags Project — involves law enforcement agencies from Washington, British Columbia, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska. Efforts to increase seatbelt use rates on Indian reservations is also a focus of Commission efforts. Washington is a leader in the area of seatbelt promotion, with a statewide seatbelt use rate that is one of the highest in the United States.

Comprehensive And Easily Accessible Collision Information

Who has information about collisions in Washington State? The list includes the State Patrol and local law enforcement agencies, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts, the Liquor Control Board, and the state departments of Transportation, Licensing, Health, and Social and Health Services. Other sources of data include other states, federal agencies, other countries, insurance companies, hospitals — the list is endless. Now suppose you want to access this data and put it all together to build one comprehensive traffic safety picture? In Washington, that's easy. In other states, you would have to go to the many agencies where the data is housed, as the sharing of information doesn't always happen. Also, there needs to be an organization that functions as a clearinghouse, able to compile the information, tabulate it and take the calls from people who want it. The Traffic Safety Commission's Traffic Records Data Center (TRDC) is such a clearinghouse. Collision research and public opinion research is also conducted by TRDC staff. And within the TRDC, the collection of data about fatal crashes for use by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is handled by people who work with the Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS).

The DWI Task Force in Clark County, a private/public partnership of traffic safety proponents, arranged to have the billboard space paid for by the Farmers Insurance Company. With a grant from the Commission, this message was created for the billboard.



It's Working

Promoting Safe Roadways Is A Good Investment

The work done across the state to reduce traffic collisions, serious injuries and deaths makes sense for more than just humanitarian reasons. Traffic collisions are expensive and taxpayers shoulder about 30% of the medical costs from collisions. The medical bill each year in Washington State is about \$276 million. Taxpayers pick up the tab, because with expensive stays in intensive care units and long term rehabilitation centers (which is frequently the case with serious injury collisions) insurance doesn't cover the cost. If we reduce the collision rate, we then reduce the medical bills and therefore the cost to society from collisions. Promoting safe roadways saves money.

People Are Alive Today Because of Roadway Safety Efforts

Since 1971 the traffic death rate in Washington has been going down. To calculate the death rate, statistics experts look at the number of people who are licensed to drive, the number of miles they travel and the number of fatalities from roadway collisions. The death rate in 1971 was 4.1 deaths for every 100 million miles of travel. The death rate in 1992 was 1.3 deaths per 100 million miles of travel. If the 1971 death rate had remained the same through 1992, another 11,415 people would have lost their lives in roadway collisions.

Percent of total collisions & total licensed drivers
By age groups - 1993

