



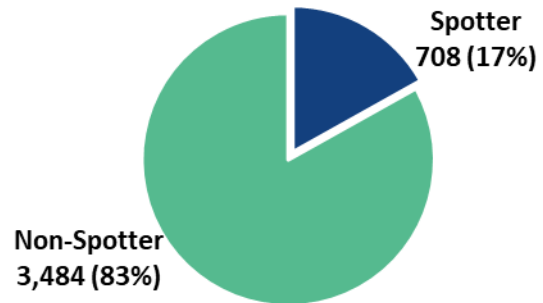
Spotter Patrols and Seat Belt Use

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 2022, there have been 326 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.

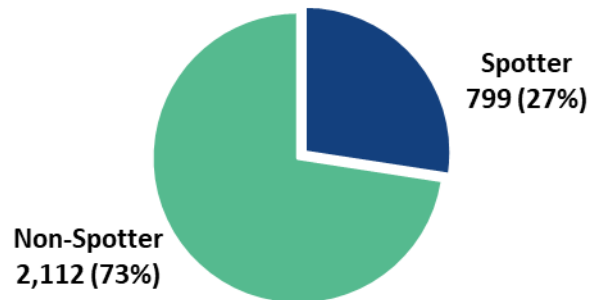
Law enforcement officers use High-Visibility Enforcement (HVE) to promote seat belt compliance and change unlawful traffic behavior. An HVE patrol is a period of time when officers conduct traffic stops for certain violations. One HVE strategy involves the use of a spotter patrol. A spotter patrol consists 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.

From January 1, 2022 to April 30, 2024, there were 799 seat belt HVE patrols conducted throughout Washington, resulting in 2,911 warnings and infractions. Of these patrols, 17% (n=133) employed a spotter and 83% (n=666) did not.

Seat Belt Patrol Hours by Spotter Type, 01/2022-04/2024



Seat Belt Warnings and Infractions by Spotter Type, 01/2022-04/2024



Did you know?

- ⇒ Spotter patrols can result in higher levels of observed violations.
- ⇒ Although spotter patrols accounted for about one-sixth of all seat belt HVE patrol hours, they accounted for nearly a quarter of all seat belt warnings and infractions.
- ⇒ The average hours per patrol were similar between seat belt HVE patrols using a spotter (5.3) compared to those that did not use a spotter (5.2).
- ⇒ Spotter patrols yielded more seat belt warnings and infractions per hour compared to non-spotter patrols.





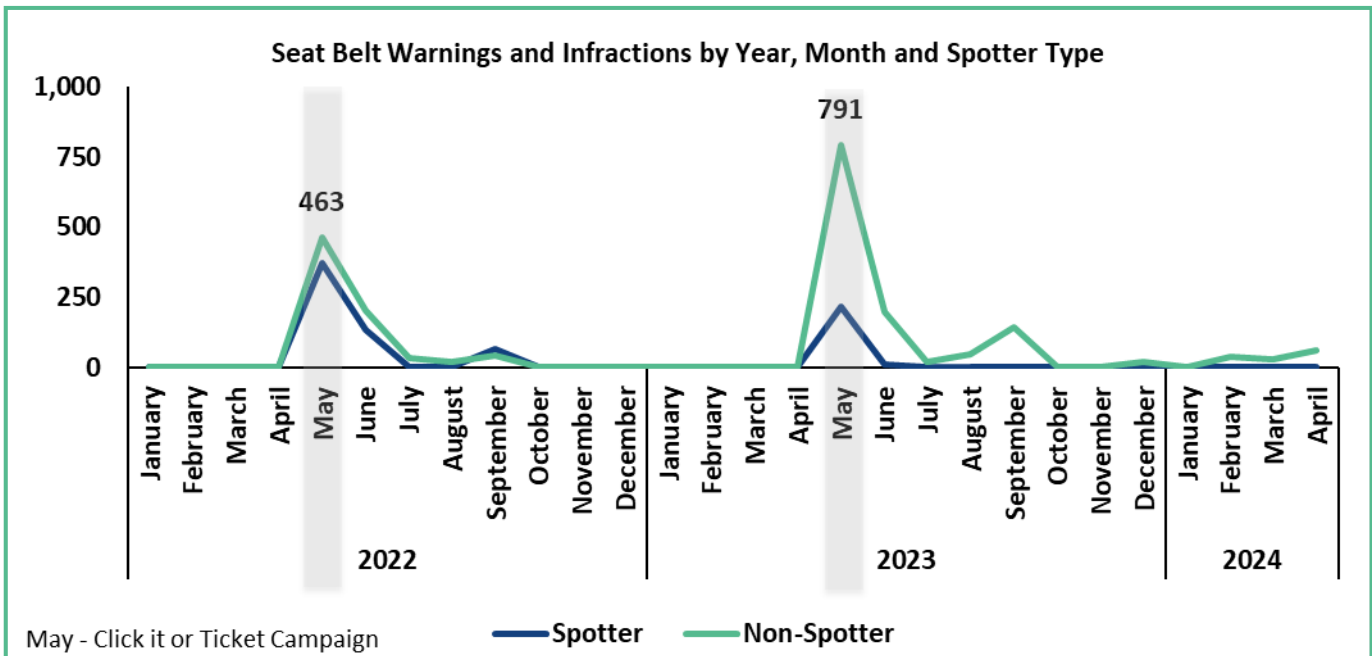
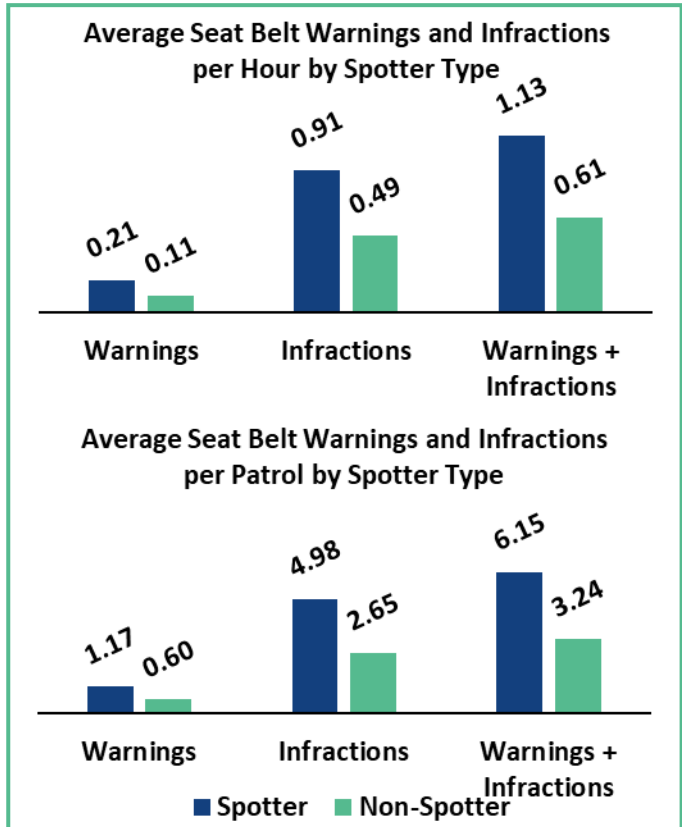
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Spotter patrols for seat belt use yielded an average of 1.1 warnings and infractions per hour compared to 0.6 per hour amongst non-spotter patrols. Spotter patrols averaged about 6.2 seat belt warnings and infractions per patrol—nearly twice that of non-spotter patrols which averaged 3.2 seat belt warnings and infractions per patrol.

Seat belt 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, nine percent of contacts resulted in a seat belt warning and 36 percent resulted in a seat belt infraction. Among non-spotter patrols, 17 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. About one in three seat belt non-spotter patrols recorded zero seat belt warnings and infractions compared to five percent of seat belt HVE patrols using a spotter.

About one in three seat belt non-spotter patrols recorded zero seat belt warnings and infractions compared to one in twenty spotter patrols.



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