Occupant Protection

Problem Identification

The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) Police Department is committed to increasing public awareness of occupant protection and enforcing corresponding laws. Although the Commonwealth of Virginia does not have a primary offense seatbelt law, the MWAA Police Department considers occupant protection a top priority of our enforcement efforts. Because the Virginia seatbelt law is not a primary offense, our officers must observe a motorist commit another violation before they can stop them and issue a summons for a seatbelt violation.

Each year, the MWAA Police Department conducts seatbelt surveys in May and November in conjunction with *Click It or Ticket* campaigns. An officer is assigned to a designated intersection, during a specified timeframe, to observe 100 drivers and document if they were wearing their seatbelts. The MWAA PD conducted seatbelt surveys before and after each *Click It or Ticket* campaign to determine our starting point with motorist compliance as well as the effectiveness of our efforts. The initial seatbelt survey in May 2015 showed an 82% compliance with seatbelt laws while the November survey showed an 11% increase, with a compliance rate of 93%. The average seatbelt usage rate for the Commonwealth of Virginia for 2015 was 80.9%.

Our agency had 67 injury or fatality crashes during 2014, with 5 reporting that the lack of seatbelt usage was a contributing factor in the crash. Therefore our agency found this to be an area we could improve upon even though it was only 7.4% of the crashes.

A Click It or Ticket Seat Belt enforcement Area sign placed on one of the Airports Authority Roadways.

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Problem Identification (continued)

Another issue we identified was that our lone traffic fatality in 2014 had a failure of seatbelt usage as a contributing factor in the death of the occupant. We established that this area needed to be improved upon and set a goal of reducing the percentage of injury and fatality crashes by 1.5% from our 2014 statistics. We set objectives to increase the percentage of occupants utilizing seatbelts throughout 2015 by 5% as well as improve the maximum usage of seatbelts by the travelling public by 1.5% from 2015. Our agency discovered during studies and surveys that the most frequent violators of seatbelt laws were airport employees leaving work after the completion of their shifts. Research identified a decline in seatbelt usage during airport workforce shift changes on roadways leaving employee parking lots.

In an effort to prioritize officer safety, the MWAA PD mandates the use of seatbelts except in exigent circumstances. This requirement extends to anyone riding in department vehicles including prisoners and individuals participating in a ride-along. The MWAA PD realizes that police officers are not immune to the risks of failing to use their seatbelts and must also set a positive example for the public.

Policy

Our department has a policy directing that police officers shall wear seatbelts unless exigent circumstances prevent their use. Although the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department does not have a specific reference in Department General Orders, we consider occupant protection a top priority of our department.

Below is the portion of the Department General Orders referencing seatbelt use by the officers, prisoners, and ride-along participants:

4-100.03 SAFETY BELTS

The use of safety belts will generally be governed by Virginia Motor Vehicle Code §46.2-1094. However, the language of the Code will be interpreted narrowly. Seat belts shall be worn unless exigent circumstances prevent their use.

4-300.04 PRISONER TRANSPORT VEHICLES

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Policy (continued)

A. Whenever possible, prisoners shall be transported in caged units. When that is not possible or practical, the following procedures will be used:

1. Prisoners will be handcuffed and searched described in section 4-300.01 of this policy, and seat belted in the front passenger seat. If an additional officer is needed or required they should follow in a separate vehicle, while maintaining visual contact at all times. Once the arresting officer and prisoner are securely in the detention center, the secondary officer will return to regularly assigned patrol duties.

1-107.02 RIDE-ALONG PROGRAM PROCEDURES

D. Specific Responsibilities During the Ride:

The host officer will read and explain the rules and regulations governing the Ride-Along Program to the observer prior to leaving the police station. During the ride, the host officer will instruct the observer on procedures required while riding in the police vehicle, and possible consequences resulting from the observer's participation in the program.

1. Both the officer and the ride-along observer(s) must wear seat belts while the vehicle is in motion in conformance with G.O. 4-100 and State law.

Cpl. Christian Tacik shown above wearing his seat belt while on patrol.

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Policy (continued)

Our agency ensures compliance with this policy by supervisors conducting random spot checks. When available, the supervisors also conduct inspections of in-car and body camera footage to ensure compliance as well.

Planning

Throughout the year, traffic safety initiatives are conducted by the MWAA PD during routine patrols and special enforcement details. Most of the selective enforcement efforts are coordinated through the Dulles Toll Road Office of the police department and are frequently scheduled in conjunction with local, state and national campaigns.

The department conducted eight separate details to support goals of increasing both enforcement and public awareness of occupant protection laws. Enforcement efforts ranged from participating in *Click It or Ticket* campaigns, random checks, child safety seat installations and child safety seat inspections. The department evaluated trends in recent accidents to look for any increase in injuries or fatalities related to seatbelt usage and conducted enforcement efforts corresponding to relevant target areas during and timeframes. The examination of crash data and surveys determined that most offenses occurred during the shift change for airport employees on roadways leading from employee lots. Patrol officers checked drivers who were stopped for other traffic offenses to see if occupants were utilizing seatbelts. Police officers were positioned at toll booths to check for primary violations while providing a safe vantage point to inspect if occupants were using seatbelts and child restraint devices.

To follow-up on our efforts, we conducted post enforcement effort surveys to determine if there was an increase of seatbelt usage. Increases in the use of seatbelts were considered positive or successful outcomes for our efforts.

Training:

During 2015, ten MWAA police officers received Child Safety Seat Technician Certification or Child Safety Seat Technician Recertification. Our department has approximately 35 certified Child Safety Seat Technicians to check and install child seats in vehicles. Police

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Training (continued)

recruits receive training on occupant safety during coursework at the police academy. Courses such as Crash Investigation, Motor Vehicle Traffic Laws and Emergency Vehicle Operations include both adult and child occupant protection laws. Seventeen recruits attended the academy for our department during 2015.

During 2015, the department also conducted roll call training for all officers on seatbelt and child safety laws within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Officers were also provided pamphlets which covered all occupant safety laws within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Police officers had the option to attend in-service coursework, to include child seat installation classes, provided by the academy. The department also had two officers attend Crash Data Recorder Technician Certification which allowed the department the ability to review vehicle crash data to determine if seatbelts were used in a vehicle involved in a crash.

Example of one of our patrol vehicles with “seatbelt Enforcement” and “Buckle Up” vehicle magnets to help increase the public’s awareness of occupant protection.

Public Information and Education

During 2015, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department used a diverse strategy to inform and educate the public about the importance of occupant protection. Our department participated in multiple child safety seat installation fairs at various community events. One example was the Dulles Day Plane Pull which occurred on September 19, 2015,

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Public Information and Education (continued)

from 1030 to 1600 hours. This large festival had nearly 17,000 participants and numerous attendees took advantage of the MWAA PD Community Liaison Team's Occupant Safety Awareness Booth. The department also had strong presence at health fairs, including the Dulles International Airport Health Fair on November 3, 2015, from 1130 to 1530 hours. At these events, officers were able to educate members of the community on seat belt laws within the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as provide training on occupant safety and the proper use and installation of child safety seats and restraints.

Photo of members of our department's Community Liaison Team conducting Occupant Safety Awareness and educating the public on seat belt laws.

The MWAA Police Department also utilized variable message boards to remind the public of current traffic safety initiatives and campaigns. Numerous message boards were placed throughout the jurisdiction displaying "Click It or Ticket" messages to increase public

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Public Information and Education (continued)

awareness. The variable message boards were positioned in strategic locations and moved to different sites to obtain the maximum exposure to the public.

The MWAA Police Department also utilized portable "Seat Belt Enforcement Zone" yard signs throughout our jurisdictions to further promote the message about the importance of occupant protection. Vehicle magnets were attached to police vehicles to further educate the public of these efforts. These magnets include the messages "Seatbelt Enforcement" and "Buckle Up".

Example of variable message boards displaying "Click It or Ticket" Campaign Messages.

Enforcement

As stated, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department conducted enforcement during routine patrols and special enforcement details. Police officers were positioned at exit ramps and toll booths to check for primary violations while looking for seatbelt violations at the same time. During these patrol enforcement efforts, our department directed in excess of 25,000 hours towards occupant protection enforcement and education efforts.

During enforcement and education efforts, the MWAA PD did not use grant-funded overtime during any patrol or special detail. During 2015, the Metropolitan Washington

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Enforcement (continued)

Airports Authority Police Department issued 66 seatbelt summonses and eight child seat belt summonses during details. Of this total, 22 summonses were issued during target timeframes and locations and 14 were issued during nighttime hours. During the *Click It or Ticket* campaign, officers issued 37 summonses for seatbelt violations at predetermined target areas. Officers also made 76 contacts whereby officers were able to provide educational information to members of the public about importance of occupant protection. Of the eight child safety seat summonses, two were issued during target timeframes within target locations. There were two child safety seat summons issued during nighttime hours.

Example of seat belt enforcement yard sign used to increase awareness of enforcement efforts

Outcomes

Due to continual efforts of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department, we have experienced extremely low numbers of fatalities and injuries due to occupants not wearing seatbelts. In 2015, we experienced one fatality accident which involved an occupant not wearing a seatbelt. We have been able to maintain one or less traffic fatality each year for the last 4 years, which we attribute in part to continued efforts to enforce and

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Outcomes (continued)

educate the public about occupant protection. We also have seen a decrease in crashes involving occupants who were injured and failed to wear a seatbelt or child restraint.

During 2015, the department set a goal to increase seatbelt usage during the year by 5% and to attempt to exceed the Commonwealth of Virginia average for seatbelt usage. We were able to meet both goals.

Cpl. Uwemedimo Eshietedoho
26 Occupant Protection summons issued during 2015

Cpl. Irakli Nijaradze
9 Occupant Protection summons issued during 2015

Cpl. Stephen Washington
8 Occupant Protection summons issued during 2015

Sgt. Robert Patterson
6 Occupant Protection summons issued during 2015

Cpl. Gregory Belden
3 Occupant Protection summons issued during 2015

The beginning of 2015 showed an 82% average of seatbelt usage by drivers within MWAA PD jurisdiction with an increase by year's end to a 93% average, yielding an 11% increase of seatbelt usage. We were also successful in exceeding the Commonwealth of Virginia seatbelt usage average of 80.9% by 12.1%.

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Outcomes (continued)

The MWAA PD also set out to decrease the percentage of injury and fatality crashes by 1.5% over the 2014 statistics. During 2014, the department experienced a ratio of 7.4% of injury and fatality crashes involving an occupant not using occupant protection. This decreased to 4.3% in 2015. This was a 3.1% decrease, which exceeded our goal of a 1.5% decrease between 2014 and 2015. Our agency also set an objective to increase end of year seatbelt usage by the public by 1.5% between 2014 and 2015. We were able to meet this goal by going from an 89% compliance rate in 2014 to a 93% compliance rate in2015, improving our compliance rate by 4%.

Finally, the MWAA PD discovered numerous additional violations during occupant protection enforcement. Police officers encountered individuals driving with suspended/revoked licenses, expired vehicle registrations, expired safety inspections, wanted subjects and drug possession. Finally, we found that educational and enforcement efforts did not go unnoticed by the public as individual citizens contacted the agency to compliment officer efforts to improve highway safety.