Occupant Protection

Problem Identification:

In 2014, the City of Virginia Beach had 24 fatal crashes. Those fatal crashes claimed the lives of five people that were unrestrained in their vehicles. This equates to 21% of the fatalities in 2014. In November 2014, the VBPD conducted a "Click-It-Or-Ticket" survey that showed a usage rate of 86% in the pre-survey and a usage rate of 88% in the post-survey. The problem of unrestrained motorists was identified, and is confirmed through statistics maintained by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). These statistics indicate a decline in statewide seatbelt usage from 80.5% in 2010 to 77.3% in 2014. Additionally, our efforts were focused on the age group of 21-35 years of age. This was influenced by data obtained from the Virginia DMV and the Virginia Strategic Highway Safety Plan indicating that the largest numbers of unbelted drivers involved in fatal and serious crashes are in this age range across the state of Virginia. In 2013, 3 of 10 (30%) of unrestrained fatalities fell into this age range. In 2014, there were 5 unrestrained fatalities and 1 fell into our target age range (20%). A review of department crash data indicated three areas where higher crash volume and concern was noted. These areas were Shore Drive, which has historically experienced fatal crashes, the Oceanfront/Resort area due to the high volume of traffic during the summer, and Town Center in part for its location near one of the busiest and high crash intersections in the city.

The Virginia Beach Police Department (VBPD) takes a proactive approach to promote public awareness and compliance when it comes to Occupant Protection. The Commonwealth of Virginia does not have a primary adult seatbelt law; therefore, Virginia Beach Police Officers must observe a primary violation, such as a moving infraction or an equipment violation, to stop a vehicle before issuing an adult seatbelt summons. However, if an officer has reasonable suspicion a person under the age of 18 and is unrestrained seatbelt violations become a primary offense.

The VBPD took part in the annual "Click-It-Or-Ticket" Mini-Mobilization seatbelt survey during May and November of 2015. Officers went to designated areas and observed 100 motorists and documented whether or not they were wearing their seatbelts. Officers conducted a "Pre" and "Post" survey at the beginning and end of each mobilization to compare the statistical data.

In 2015, the pre-survey showed 81% compliance and the post survey showed 92% compliance for the May Mini-Mobilization. During the November Mini Mobilization, the pre-survey showed 84% compliance and the post-survey showed 94% compliance. This survey was conducted in the 700 block of South Rosemont Road, a highly traveled roadway in the City of Virginia Beach. During this timeframe, officers conducted heavy enforcement

efforts and saturation patrols to reinforce occupant protection. Although we strive for 100% seatbelt usage, we did note an increase in usage during this Mini-Mobilization.

Policy:

Posters displayed throughout VBPD buildings make seatbelt usage a priority

Since many deaths and injuries result from failing to be properly restrained, the VBPD has policies on enforcement action for safety belt violations and child safety seat violations. Additionally, the VBPD has a policy that requires the use of seatbelts by officers while operating any police vehicle. When one of our police vehicles is involved in a crash, the vehicle's event data recorder is downloaded. An internal investigation is conducted if an officer is suspected of not using their seatbelt during a crash. Based on the investigation, an officer could face disciplinary action.

10.01 Department Vehicles

"All personnel shall wear seat belts when operating any Department vehicle."

12.01 Traffic Law Enforcement

"The enforcement of traffic laws as established by the Code of Virginia and the Municipal Code of the City of Virginia Beach is the responsibility of all Virginia Beach Police Officers. Officers are vested with the enforcement of traffic codes for the purpose of gaining voluntary compliance in furtherance of enhancing traffic safety in the City of Virginia Beach."

12.06 Selective Enforcement

"The Virginia Beach Police Department is committed to promoting traffic safety to the residents of and visitors to the City of Virginia Beach. This commitment requires the department to work cooperatively with other city, state and federal agencies in promoting traffic safety, and addressing traffic law enforcement needs. In furtherance of this commitment, the Deputy Chief - Operations or his/her designee will formulate and maintain a selective enforcement plan, which will summarize the traffic enforcement priorities of the Virginia Beach Police Department. At a minimum, the Traffic Enforcement Priority Plan will consider or be based on:

- *A compilation and review of traffic collisions*
- *A compilation and review of enforcement activities*
- *A comparison of collision data and enforcement activities*
- *Traffic volume and conditions*

The plan will be disseminated to the various components of the operations division for action. Such actions should include:

- *The implementation of selective enforcement techniques such as:*
    - *Planned patrols*
    - *Geographic/temporal assignment of personnel*
    - *Directed Traffic Patrols both overt and covert*
    - *Stationary Observation*
    - *Traffic Safety Checkpoints*
- *Placement of new or temporary signage*
- *Use of roadside Dynamic Message Boards*

Planning:

As stated in the Selective Enforcement General Order: "*…the Deputy Chief - Operations or his/her designee will formulate and maintain a selective enforcement plan, which will summarize the traffic enforcement priorities* …" The Virginia Beach Police Department's Traffic Safety Unit scheduled numerous saturation patrols each week of 2015. During these patrols, Traffic Safety Unit members focused on a specific area of the city for a period of time that was discussed prior to the enforcement efforts. Officers conducted aggressive seatbelt enforcement during these saturation patrols. Often times, patrol officers assigned to the precinct in which the saturation patrols were being conducted were informed of the patrols so that they had an opportunity to participate. The saturation patrols that were conducted were spread out through the entire city.

Safety belt violations were seen as a widespread offense throughout the city; therefore, seatbelt grant funded overtime was utilized in each of the four precincts. This grant is provided by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and the Virginia Highway Safety Office (VAHSO) to agencies that apply for the funding. A determination is made by VAHSO on the amount of allotted funding based on a number of factors, which include the potential traffic safety impact, prior performance on grants, and collision statistics and rankings. Officers are selected to participate in grant funded activities based upon their demonstrated performance in enforcement of occupant protection violations.

Frequently, citizens will make a complaint regarding a traffic safety issue such as speeding occurring in a specific part of the city. In these instances, officers conducted enforcement efforts in the target area(s) during the timeframes the complainant stated. We have a traffic enforcement tracking form (PD-137) that we utilize to keep track of the time officers spent on the complaint, number of vehicles that were stopped, and number of traffic summonses that were issued while working the target area(s). During 2015, we increased enforcement efforts in our target areas of Shore Drive, Town Center, and the Oceanfront. We found occupant protection to be a major issue in this area at all hours of the day. As a

result, officers planned to conduct heavy enforcement efforts and saturation patrols to reinforce occupant protection during both day and night time operations.

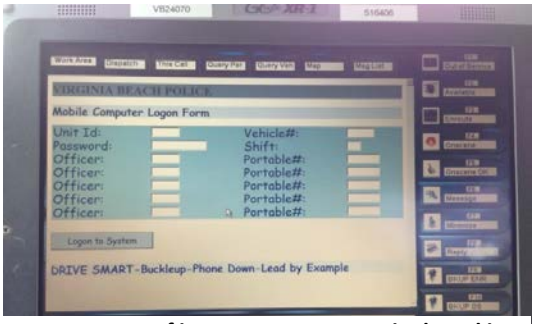
Part of the Virginia Highway Safety Plan is to enforce seatbelt violations during nighttime hours. Our agency applied for and received grant funding from the Virginia DMV. These grant funds, once received, were used to enforce occupant protection laws in our targeted areas and during our targeted times, in addition to the entire city.

Training:

Our Police Officers have received several types of occupant protection related training in 2015:

- Throughout 2015, 47 recruits successfully completed the 59th and 60th Virginia Beach Police Department Recruit Academies. During the DUI and Basic Crash Investigation classes, recruits were educated on the current occupant protection laws.
- All department members and recruits are exposed to a visual training aid at the VBPD Driver Training Facility. This training aid is a Virginia Beach Police Department vehicle that rolled over where the officer involved was wearing his safety belt and survived.
- The Virginia Beach Police Department currently has eight (8) officers who are certified child restraint technicians that assist parents and guardians of young children with the proper installation of their child's safety seats.
- One officer completed National Standardized Child Passenger Safety training in 2015.
- One officer received certification as a National Standardized Child Passenger Safety instructor. This officer assisted with several training schools in the region.
- Seven (7) officers attended Basic Crash School, which included a detailed examination of the vehicle's safety restraint system.
- Four (4) officers attended Advanced Crash School, which included a more in depth focus of the vehicle's air bag modules and safety restraint systems.

To reinforce the importance of seatbelt use by VBPD police officers, the logon screen for all in-car computers reinforces our position as community leaders with the statement "DRIVE SMART – BUCKLE UP – PHONE DOWN – LEAD BY EXAMPLE." This provides officers with a reminder at the start of each shift to do the simple things to remain safe on our roadways. All department personnel are required by policy to wear their seatbelts at all times while they are operating a city vehicle.



Logon screen of in-car computer terminals making seatbelt usage a priority

Public Information and Education:

Since Virginia Beach is a known resort destination and is home to several military bases, educating the public on occupant protection is a top priority. In 2015, members of the Virginia Beach Police Department's Traffic Safety Unit conducted 33 traffic safety lectures for the United States Armed Forces and local schools. Approximately 5,888 military personnel and local citizens were provided education and training during these lectures. During the presentation, officers discussed the importance of occupant protection laws and provided examples of the consequences related to not wearing your safety belt properly when involved in a crash.

The Virginia Beach Police Department partnered with Virginia Beach City Public Schools and Sentara Health Care with the successful delivery of the "Every 15 Minutes" Program. This program is designed to educate students and their families of the consequences of not being properly restrained, driving under the influence, and distracted driving. This program presents students and their parents with a firsthand view of the entire DUI process starting at the crash scene where police, fire, and rescue respond to a fatal crash. Students observe the process involved on scene, at the hospital, jail, and court. The targeted audience is high school aged students who are new to driving.

Poster encouraging the donation of old car seats

The Virginia Beach Police Department's Traffic Safety Unit and Fatal Crash Team partnered with Drive Safe Hampton Roads and AAA Tidewater to assist with the 2015 Child Safety Seat Roundup. Officer Travis Aicher, with the VBPD Fatal Crash Team, is a member of Drive Safe Hampton Roads and coordinated the Child Safety Seat Roundup. The goal of this program is to remove old and potentially unsafe child safety seats from our roadways. This year, 556 child safety seats were collected during the event. The VBPD also held events open to the public where officers trained in the installation of child safety seats assisted families in the proper installation of their child's safety seat.

Additionally, the Virginia Beach Police Department and the Traffic Safety Unit utilized social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube to remind the public of the importance of proper seatbelt use. Shown below is a "tweet" used to enforce the importance of proper seatbelt use. In addition, the Virginia Beach Police Department was featured in a public service announcement in the 2015 Sunny Day Guide that was available to citizens in the resort

area. This ad was designed to educate citizens on Virginia's current child restraint laws. Thousands of copies of this guide were published and available to the public.

VBPD Social Media Outreach

Enforcement:

The Virginia Beach Police Department utilizes planned patrols, saturations patrols, and traffic safety checkpoints to strictly enforce occupant protection. During 2015, the Virginia Beach Police Department's Traffic Safety Unit conducted 162 saturation patrols. During those saturation patrols, officers issued 1,610 traffic summonses, of which 275 were occupant protection infractions. Additionally in 2015, the Virginia Beach Police Department noted an increase in the number of seatbelt summonses issued.

Occupant Protection Statistics

	2014	2015
Seatbelt Summonses	4676	4712
Child Seat Summonses	622	424

In the months of May and November of 2015, members of the Department participated in the "Click-It-Or-Ticket" campaign and the "Route 60 Blitz". The Virginia Beach Police Department issued 268 seatbelt summonses and 32 child seat summonses during the "Click-It-Or-Ticket" 2015 Mobilizations. The "Route 60 Blitz" is a statewide effort that involves heavy traffic enforcement on any Route 60 in the Commonwealth of Virginia in an effort to make our roadways safer. In Virginia Beach, Route 60 is Shore Drive, which aligned with one of our target areas. On May 22, 2015, 11 officers participated and issued 23 summonses and affected 4 arrests.

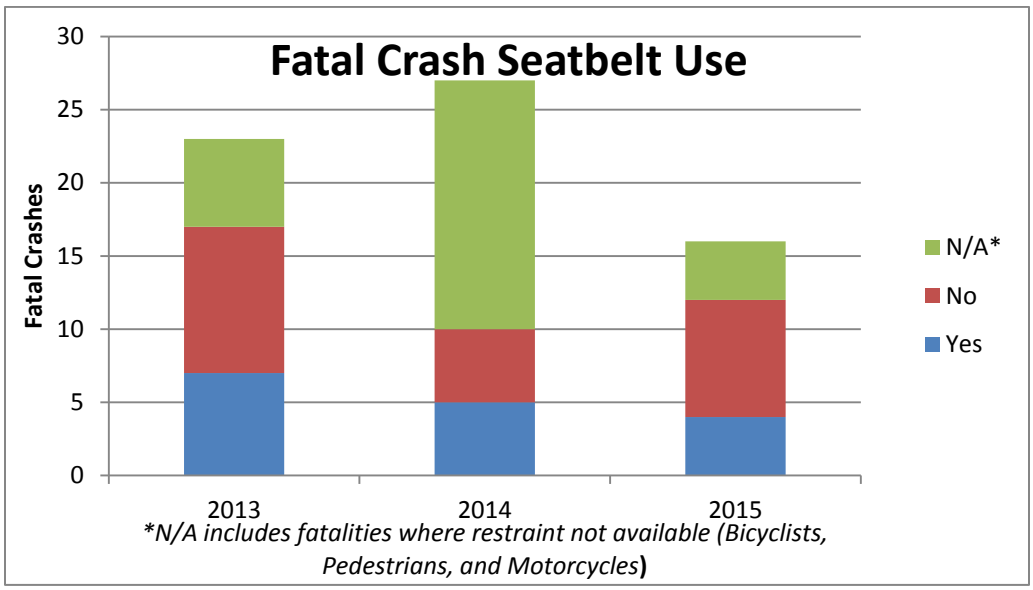
To follow up with the plan to address our target areas, there were 35 saturation patrols conducted on Shore Drive, 24 patrols in the Oceanfront area, and 11 high intensity saturation patrols in Town Center. At the Oceanfront, 656 summonses were issued for seatbelt violations, and 73 child restraint summonses were issued. In the targeted enforcement area of Town Center, 126 seatbelt citations were issued in addition to 18 child restraint citations. Shore Drive enforcement yielded 95 seatbelt citations and 14 child restraint citations.

Occupant Protection

Seatbelt enforcement is a top priority in the Virginia Beach Police Department due to the tragic events that take place from not being properly restrained. Officers are encouraged to enforce occupant protection laws during their normal working hours; however, Seatbelt Grant overtime was available to officers to come in on their time off to enforce traffic violations specifically looking for seatbelt and child restraint infractions. In 2015, officers spent 2,392 hours utilizing Seatbelt Grant overtime. During this time, officers issued 1,602 seatbelt summonses and 67 child seat summonses.

Outcomes:

The Virginia Beach Police Department continuously puts forth an asserted effort into enforcing occupant protection and impaired driving laws, and as such we have seen a decrease in the amount of citizens involved in fatal crashes. As seen below, there was as overall decrease in total fatal crashes despite a slight increase from 2014 to 2015 in unrestrained fatalities. However, we do note a substantial decrease in all categories from 2013 statistics as well.



Our department also sees the importance in recognizing officers that go above and beyond their duties when it comes to traffic safety enforcement. The VBPD recognizes the top three officers at each command that excel in seatbelt enforcement through our Traffic Safety Bulletin that is distributed semi-annually.

Occupant Protection

Excerpt from 2015 Traffic Safety Bulletin

2015 Statistics
July 1st - December 31st

The statistics below show the top 3 producers in each of the 4 precincts and Special Operations. This is an example of just how committed the Department and these officers are to improving traffic safety on the roadways of Virginia Beach. Research suggests that a more proactive enforcement effort will decrease the likelihood of a crash.

SEATBELT SUMMONS

1st Precinct		2nd Precinct		3rd Precinct		4th Precinct		Special Ops	
Hamed, T.B.	163	Skinner, R.D.	205	Kenworthy, B.R	84	Lewis, M.E.	127	Ford, J.R.	300
Trout, J.G.	80	Dolida, J.P.	141	Wallace, K.A.	77	Steele, D.P.	120	Medlin, J.	265
Kavanagh, E.J.	78	Coerse, C.L.	123	Samuels, S.J.	70	Hamann, P.E.	70	Silba, M.P.	205

Traffic Safety Pins

The Traffic Safety Unit takes part in officer recognition by issuing a unit specific pin to be worn with an officer's uniform. This pin is earned by officers assigned to the unit who achieve 60 DUI arrests and conduct four (4) safety stand-down lectures during their assignment. Officers are then issued the pin and may continue to wear the pin after completion of their tenure with TSU. The pin indicates their proficiency and dedication to traffic safety initiatives and allows them to stand out from their peers in a positive manner. One officer earned their pin in 2015.

The VBPD was recognized with two separate awards from Virginia DMV stemming from the 2015 "Click-It-Or- Ticket" Campaign. The two awards that were presented to VBPD by DMV and the Virginia Highway Safety Office were "Most Improved Seatbelt Use, 2015" and "Highest Seatbelt Use, 2015."

Occupant Protection

The Seatbelt Leadership Award recognizes a law enforcement officer who went above and beyond his or her normal duties during the "Click-It-Or-Ticket" 2015 May Mobilization. Award winners are those who made aggressive enforcement efforts during the campaign, along with promoting seatbelt use to the public and community through education and outreach. In 2015, MPO Tim Hamed from the department's First Precinct was nominated for this award for his enforcement efforts during this time period.

The Virginia Beach Police Department utilizes Virginia's "Saved by the Belt" program to identify citizens that are involved in serious motor vehicle crashes where seatbelts helped save their lives or minimized their injuries. The program encourages citizens to always wear their seatbelts and to ensure that their children are properly restrained while they are traveling in their vehicles. The program stresses the significance of the use of seatbelts in combination with the vehicle's airbag system when involved in a crash. Unfortunately there were no nominees for this award for 2015 as certain requirements for the award were not met, such as being a Virginia resident and not having been cited for a violation of law in the crash.