Traffic Safety Culture: Definitions, Conceptual Frameworks, & Recommendations for Change

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Abstract

Transportation-related crashes result in more than 400 deaths, four million injuries, and 45 billion dollars in direct and indirect costs each year in Iowa. Interventions to reduce transportation-related injuries and deaths have historically focused on reducing risk through education, enforcement, engineering, and environmental design, usually through the use of one approach at a time. Although transportation crashes, along with the resulting injuries and fatalities, have been reduced as a result of these approaches, these interventions do not effectively integrate all factors related to traffic crashes.

Traffic safety culture is a powerful influence on driving behavior that has often been neglected when developing interventions. A culture that tolerates or encourages risky driving will generally resist safety interventions, hinder traffic safety policy, and propagate dangerous driving behaviors. Traffic safety culture is directly related to the frequency of transportation-related injuries and deaths in a community.

Despite increasing attention to the role of traffic safety culture throughout Western Europe, Australia, and the United States, there remains a critical gap in our knowledge about how to advance and improve safety culture throughout the population. This presentation defines the concept of traffic safety culture, introduces conceptual models that explain traffic safety culture, and reviews the implementation of culture change initiatives. The history of seat belts in motor vehicles will be used to demonstrate a framework for traffic safety culture.

Keywords: traffic safety culture— change theories—seatbelts—Toward Zero Deaths—culture transformation

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