

**1997 Herman Goldstein Award
for Excellence
in Problem-Oriented Policing**

**Illinois State Police
Operation Cool - Saving Teens' Lives**

Abstract

Introduction

Operation Cool was developed by Illinois State Police (ISP) District 10 with the goal of reducing the number of teenagers perishing in automobile crashes. The program accomplishes this goal through increasing seat belt usage by high school students (with a long-term goal of at least 70% compliance). Community resource mobilization permits Operation Cool to use an incentive and reward system to encourage compliance, thus making the use of seat belts "cool." ISP prepared an *Operation Cool Planning Manual* so the project can be replicated statewide. Because of the reduction in injuries and the lives that have been and will be saved, Operation Cool is nominated for the 1997 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. A brief abstract presented in the SARA model format follows.

Scanning

ISP District 10 Commander David Morgan saw the results of the problem when he observed the tragedy associated with teenage deaths, and examined the problem further using the SARA model. Noting the 17 teenage deaths in the district the previous year, and the community-wide tragedy and impact resulting, Commander Morgan believed teenagers used safety restraints less frequently than adults based on empirical data obtained at local high schools. This was exceptionally troubling as so many young people were dying when the solution seemed so simple.

Analysis

Based on empirical analysis, the ISP began a detailed analysis to determine the extent of the problem. The following were the techniques used by the ISP.

- *Direct Observation/Interviews*
- *Community Meetings*
- *Surveys*
- *Data Analysis*

Based upon extensive statistical, anecdotal and focus group input, it was determined that a deep-rooted and longstanding attitudinal problem exists regarding teenage use of seat belts, resulting in a usage rate of only 10-20 percent within the district for teen-agers. Understanding of this problem helped define the response.

Response

Based on the analysis, it was determined that the biggest hurdle to the problem of seat belt usage was attitude. "It ain't cool" was a statement heard too often by the researchers to ignore. Operation Cool was developed in District 10 to address the problems identified in the analysis, and has now begun to roll out statewide.

Operation Cool is an incentive-based program to save lives by increasing seat belt compliance rates for teenagers. The business and corporate community provided the District 10 •Safety Advisory Board, Inc. approximately \$50,000 in cash and \$100,000 in "in-kind" contributions to use as incentive awards (including a new 1997 Chevrolet Cavalier). The program is aimed at teenagers in each of the 59 high schools within the geographically largest state police district in the state. Its goal is to reduce teenage injuries and deaths by increasing the rate of seat belt

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usage by teenagers. Officers conducted interviews with 10 teenagers who walked away from rollover, and who stated unequivocally that they were wearing seat belts due to Operation Cool. Students sign a contract pledging to remain in school, wear their seat belts, and to require their passengers to wear their seat belts. A separate contract (with the same essential elements) is signed with car dealerships in order to become eligible to win the automobile. During the program year, teenagers wearing seat belts receive in-kind awards, including free fast food meals, free tanning, tuxedo rentals, video rentals, etc. Media coverage was provided through media representatives on the board. Chevrolet dealers provided billboards as well as the car. Students achieving a 70% compliance rate at their school won cash grants (up to \$5,000) for their schools, to be used for such things as class trips and prom expenses.

Assessment

The program evaluation included the following elements:

- *Anecdotal Evidence* - Law enforcement officers and parents attributed the survival of some teens to the increase of seat belt usage. This was documented by officers interviewing teens surviving rollovers.
- *Surveys* - The final covert survey was compared to the initial to determine the effect of this program on seat belt usage rates.
- *Analysis* - The ISP officials looked at similar statistical information and compared this information to the information obtained in the district.

**1997 Herman Goldstein Award
for Excellence
in Problem-Oriented Policing**

**Illinois State Police
1997 Herman Goldstein Award Nomination**

OPERATION COOL - SAVING TEENS' LIVES

Introduction

Illinois State Police District 10 developed Operation Cool to lessen the tragedy of teenage deaths in vehicle crashes through increasing seat belt usage by high school students (with a long-term goal of at least 70% compliance). Operation Cool uses a positive incentive and reward system to encourage compliance, making the use of seat belts "cool." Based on the success of the program in the district, the ISP has developed a planning guide to assist in implementing the program statewide. Because of the tremendous success of this program, the ISP is nominating Operation Cool for the 1997 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. This portion of the nomination is the detailed description of the program presented in SARA format.

Scanning

In the year preceding Operation Cool, Commander David Morgan noted that 17 teenagers had perished in auto crashes in his district. Traffic experts have long believed the lack of seat belt usage has contributed to the number of fatalities in crashes. Commander Morgan believed teenagers used safety restraints less frequently than adults, based on empirical data obtained at local high schools. He found it exceptionally troubling that so many young people were dying when the solution seemed so simple. The issue was targeted because of its district-wide impact on the lives of family survivors and on other teens. The district continued the problem-solving process to

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increase teenage seat belt usage (with a goal of at least 70 percent compliance), thereby reducing traffic fatalities.

Analysis

The ISP began an analysis to determine the extent of the problem. The following techniques were used:

- *Direct Observation* - Police officers observed teenagers leaving school without any seat belt restraint. Injuries were more severe and deaths were more numerous for the target group.
- *Interviews* - Officers talked with crash victims and teenagers.
- *Focus Group* - Officers hosted a picnic at the district headquarters for students to meet and discuss the issues.
- *Community Meetings* - The ISP met with local corporate entities, school officials and junior and senior high school students to discuss the problem and possible solutions.
- *Surveys/Questionnaires* - The ISP performed covert seat belt analysis using the United States Department of Transportation survey methodologies. This was done at each school to determine baseline seat belt usage.
- *Crime Analysis* - The ISP gathered statistical data to confirm vehicular fatality is a problem among teenage drivers.

Listed below is a summary of analytical findings. Some are from statistical sources, and others are from teenagers:

INTE.KVTF.WS

- "It's way uncool to wear seat belts."
- "If I wear a seat belt, my friends will think I'm a total geekazoid!"
- "They mess up my clothes."
- "It's not cool."

STATISTICAL sOURCES

- In 1993, 50 percent of passenger car occupants involved in a fatal crash were unrestrained.
- In fatal crashes, 73 percent of passenger car occupants who were totally ejected were unrestrained.
- Only 1 percent of occupants using seat belts were totally ejected, compared to those unrestrained.
- Nationwide, 10-24 year olds involved in fatal crashes had the lowest restraint use of 40 percent.
- Nationwide, 24 percent of traffic fatality victims are 16-24 years old.
- The fatality rate for 15-19 year olds is four times higher than 30-59 year old drivers and is second only to drivers 80+ years old.
- Statewide, teenage fatal crash victims, 14-19, increased from 179 to 234 from 1992 to 1995.

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1995 and 17 in 1996 (up to the date the program was initiated in the Fall of 1996).

- Prior to program initiation, the teenage seat belt compliance rate was 10-20 percent.

It was determined that the problem of teen-age deaths is directly associated with their reluctance to wear seat belts. Historically, the problem is a longstanding one. Analysis reveals that the underlying causes are associated with peer group and older sibling pressure. The nature of the problem is based on the premise that it simply is "cool" to challenge authority (and get away with it) by not wearing seat belts. The extent of the problem is widespread and permeates all areas and socioeconomic groups.

Those involved in the problem, of course, include the victims. Those impacted by the crash deaths most severely are the families and friends. However, substantial impact is felt throughout the community. The harms felt in the community are both obvious and subtle. Obvious is the shock and immediate loss. More subtle are the impacts upon emotionally vulnerable peers, including resulting feelings of inadequacy, helplessness and anger. Normally, group and individual grief counseling must be provided to friends, families and classmates when a teenager perishes.

The problem was previously addressed in driver education classes, public service announcements and by law. The results of those approaches were low seat belt compliance rates.

The district commander initiated community discussion about the problem. Community representatives were brought together to discuss the issues and approaches to the problem. Representatives included teenagers, school and civic leaders, citizens, media representatives and business representatives. Teenage representatives were treated to a picnic at the District 10 headquarters where they helped to focus attention upon defining the nature of the problem and bring credibility to possible responses.

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Response

Based on the analysis, the ISP determined the biggest hurdle to the problem of seat belt usage was attitude. "It ain't cool" was a statement too often heard by the officers to ignore. Operation Cool was developed to address the problems identified in the analysis. Operation Cool was originally developed in Illinois District 10 but has begun implementation throughout the state with the distribution of the *Operation Cool Planning Manual* in the late spring of 1997.

Alternative approaches were considered, most of which have been or are being tried with little success. The successful completion of the scanning and analysis phase of the SARA model, and buying in the stakeholders to the problem analysis, led to the solution with little leeway for other alternatives. The community was interested and committed, as noted by the outpouring of donations to make the program work.

WHAT IS OPERATION COOL?

- It is an incentive-based program. The business community provided the District 10 Safety Advisory Board, Inc. approximately \$50,000 in cash and \$100,000 in "in-kind" contributions to use as incentive awards (including a new 1997 Chevrolet Cavalier).
- It is aimed at teenagers. The District 10 Safety Advisory Board targeted each of the 59 high schools, public and private, within the geographically largest state police district in the state.
- It is to reduce injuries and deaths. A substantial decrease in injuries and deaths in the target population was realized. Officers conducted after-crash interviews with 10 teenagers who walked away from rollovers, and who stated unequivocally that they

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were wearing seat belts due to Operation Cool.

- Students sign a contract pledging to wear their seat belts, require their passengers to wear their seat belts, and to remain enrolled in school. A separate contract, which had the same essential elements, was signed at car dealerships to become eligible to win the automobile.
- Teenagers observed by school officials wearing their seat belts won in-kind prizes, including free fast food meals, free tanning, tuxedo rentals, video rentals, etc. Those observed not in compliance lost their opportunity to win the grand prizes.
- Media coverage was provided by media representatives on the board. Chevrolet dealers provided billboards as well as the car.
- Students achieving a 70% compliance rate at their school, as determined by covert NHTSA methodology, won cash grants for their schools, to be used for such things as class trips and prom expenses. The schools in the large and small school categories with the highest rates received \$5,000 cash awards, with others pro-rated.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

- *Phase I: Form Board* - A governing board is formed to represent the various stakeholders in the community, solicit donations and prizes and disseminate these prizes to the schools. Every school in the district is invited to participate. Awards contributed in District 10 included T-shirts, gasoline, caps, recreation gift certificates, coupons, carwashes, fast food, computers, cash and a new car, totaling about \$150,000.
- *Phase II: Initial School Involvement* - Notify and meet with schools, determine

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interest, arrange follow-ups.

- *Phase III: School Planning* - Assist schools in developing local strategies.
- *Phase IV: Initial Covert Survey* - An initial covert survey is performed by officers in plain clothes and plain vehicles at the beginning of the school year. These surveys use standards developed by the United States Department of Transportation. The results of the survey are used to baseline the school seat belt usage.
- *Phase V: School Liaison* - An initial meeting with key school personnel, including a student representative is held. This meeting includes a walk-through of the program, discussing the results of the initial covert survey and scheduling the school assembly. School assemblies are held. Safety presentations, including rollover demonstrations and exhibition of a wrecked car from a fatal crash, are included. Maximum publicity is sought. The program then operates through the school year, until the final compliance check late in the school year. Some schools may take the initiative to set up peer groups and other support activities. Interim covert surveys are optional and are performed by the school administrators. The ISP provides assistance in the methodology of the survey, if required.
- *Phase VI: Final Covert Survey* - This survey is conducted like the initial covert survey. Results are forwarded to the advisory board and awards are determined.
- *Phase VII: Prize Dissemination* - With the exception of the grand prizes, the prizes are given to the school to disseminate to students. Faculty advisors can also revoke a student's participation in the grand prize drawing if the student is caught unbuckled. The board and the agency host a ceremony at the end of the year to

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present the grand prizes. The media, educational and political leaders are invited, in addition to the student finalists. Eligible students (selected from each school by drawing) are given keys to the ignition lock to try on a mock dashboard. When the right key is inserted, sirens begin to wail and red lights flash. The ceremony is treated as a media event to maximize impact. Other grand prizes may be given, such as trips for four to Disney World or computer systems.

- *Phase Vffl:* The Future - involves evaluation and analysis by the board, and future plans. The District 10 board noted that every two years, there is a new crop of teenage drivers in the high schools to be concerned with. In order to address the root cause of peer pressure, they determined the program will continue.

To summarize the approach taken, the police agency provided the catalyst to bring community resources to bear upon a serious community problem. The community for District 10 includes nine Illinois counties, ranging from very rural to urban. The program was equally available throughout that "community." The community resources, concentrated toward the target group (determined by the scanning and analysis phases) resulted in significant results and saved lives. Establishing the District 10 Safety Advisory Board, Inc. as a nonprofit corporation not only addressed immediate issues of tax-free status for donors, it also institutionalized the group so that it could continue working on this and other problems that may arise in the future.

Assessment

The following techniques were used to determine the success of the program.

- *Anecdotal Evidence* - Law enforcement officers and parents attributed the survival of some teens to increased seat belt usage. This was documented by officers interviewing teens surviving rollovers.
- *Surveys* - The final covert survey was compared to the initial to determine the effect of this program on seat belt usage rates.
- *Analysis* - The ISP officials looked at similar statistical information and compared this information to the information obtained in the analysis.

The program seemed less successful in larger schools or schools where peer or school administration involvement was lacking. However, significant increases in seat belt usage were noted. Overall, there was a 9 percent increase in seat belt usage. However, Chrisman High School experienced a 54 percent increase. Teenage deaths resulting from rollover accidents decreased. Ten teens stated they had accidents in which they would not have survived if not for Operation Cool.

Not all schools showed an increase in seat belt use. The Tower Hill High School showed a decrease in seat belt usage by 34 percent. The assessment highlighted these problem areas for special analysis. These "special problem" areas will receive additional attention in the next year.

District 10 indicates they feel the program will be even more successful if additional manpower were available to provide support to the schools and peer groups at the schools during the program year. Accordingly, they have invited local municipal and county enforcement agencies to participate in next year's program. A sheriff and a police chief are now members of the District 10 Safety Advisory Board. Based upon the early success and the positive publicity gained, the local

agencies are supporting the program, including providing assistance in surveys and helping to publicize and support the program with their school liaison officers. District 10 feels that this approach (demonstrating success, then inviting local agencies to buy into the program) will also assist in institutionalizing the program in the future.

The ISP has found this program very effective and is committed to rolling out Operation Cool to the rest of the state and any other interested law enforcement agency, in the firm belief that there can be no greater goal than saving our children's lives.

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Agency and Officer Information

ISP's specially trained Community Oriented Policing officers assigned to District 10 were utilized in this program. The ISP has also provided problem-solving training to mid and upper level command. As the ISP moves toward achieving its goal of complete agency conversion to community oriented policing management philosophies by 1999, it is expected that other unique approaches to longstanding problems will be developed.

1. This problem-solving initiative was handled at the district level within the organization. Leadership was provided by the commander for the nine county district, with specially trained community oriented policing officers providing liaison with the community, teenagers and schools. Other officers assisted with surveys.
2. Community oriented policing officers, along with mid and upper level command, have

received problem-solving training.

3. No special incentives were provided to the officers involved in developing the program.
4. Resources and guidelines used to manage the problem-solving initiative were those received in problem-solving training.
5. There were no particular problems noted with the problem-solving model. In fact, the successful completion of the scanning and analysis phases led directly to the response developed. Involvement of major stakeholders in the scanning and analysis phases contributed a great deal to successful response implementation.
6. No resources of the agency were committed beyond the existing agency budget. The personnel time resources committed were heavy, but were provided by community oriented officers assigned to the district to do this type of problem-solving. Substantial community and corporate resources (\$150,000 in cash and in-kind services) were committed to the program, and made possible the program success.
7. Project Contact Person:

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***The District 10 Safety Advisory Board is a 20 member board established in March 1996. It is comprised of business representatives, an attorney, a certified public accountant, marketing, media, a student, Illinois State Police Command personnel, a sheriff and a chief of police. The function of this board is to manage funds and provide direction to the program.**