

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE**

**Office of Environmental Health and Engineering  
Division of Environmental Health Services  
Injury Prevention Program**

**OBSERVATIONAL SEATBELT USAGE SURVEY PROTOCOL**

**Purpose**

This protocol has been developed to assist the Injury Prevention Program staff, and other local community seatbelt use advocates, with conducting community seatbelt usage surveys. In an effort to ensure that local seatbelt surveys are reasonably consistent, this protocol provides guidance for the selection of observation locations, for survey procedures, and for recording the data.

**Setting up Observation Locations**

Consider the following criteria when selecting sites in your community to observe occupant restraint usage:

1. **Traffic type.** Select locations that provide a reasonable representation of the entire reservation population. For example, if the reservation has several major communities, when practical each major community should have at least one observation location. Try to select locations that are more likely to handle local traffic.
2. **Traffic volume.** Select locations where a larger volume of traffic can be expected.
3. **Direction of traffic flow.** Select locations where vehicles come to a complete stop. If the selected location is an intersection, only observe vehicles traveling in one direction. This will allow you to best position yourself for easiest observation of that travel direction, and will also make it easier to accurately observe seat belt use if it is a busy intersection
4. **Observer location.** Select locations based on the ability of the observer to safely park and the ability of the observer to be above or at least on the same level as the observed vehicles. This should help make observations easier and more accurate.

**Observer Safety**

Personal safety should be the primary concern. Be sure to avoid unsafe situations such as getting out of your vehicle or parking too close to traffic. Consider informing the local law enforcement agency prior to conducting observations.

## Survey Procedures

1. **Number of observations.** Each observation location should be surveyed at least once per year, for a total of 12 surveys per year. If fewer than 12 locations are identified, increase survey frequency at each location (see table below). Surveys will ideally be randomly distributed by time of day and day of week, to minimize potential bias associated with the time of observation. Also, the month of the survey should be randomly selected. However, if the local climate precludes surveys in some seasons, select appropriate months for the surveys.

Number of survey sites	Recommended survey frequency/site
2	6
4	3
6	2
12	1

2. **Length of observations.** The observation period at each location will be 1 hour. If more than 60 observations are made at an observation location, use additional survey forms.
3. **Exclusions.** Every vehicle observed at the observation location will be included, except for:
  - 1-ton or larger trucks,
  - school or patient transport vehicles (buses or large vans),
  - commercial vehicles, and
  - any vehicle you know you have already counted at that observation location (do not knowingly include the same vehicle more than once).
  - No attempt will be made to differentiate between Native American and non-native occupants, or between local and non-local occupants.
  - If there is any doubt about an observation, do not include any data for that occupant. For example, darkly-tinted windows can make it difficult to observe seat belt use/non-use. Do not guess about an observation.

## Using the Observational Seat Belt Survey Form

1. The attached observational seat belt survey form will be used to document observations. Observation entries can be made using an “X” or “✓” in the appropriate row/column.
2. **Driver Gender Column.** Record the gender of each driver. If the gender is uncertain, enter a “U” in the “M” column for that vehicle.
3. **Driver Belted and Passenger Belted Columns.** Only include the driver and front seat passenger use/non-use of a seat belt involving a shoulder belt. Other restraint types (e.g. lap-only belt, or child safety seat use) and back seat passengers should not be included in these columns.
4. **Other Observations Column.** This can be used to record unrestrained children, cell phone use, other types of distracted driving, passengers riding in the bed of a pick-up truck, etc.

# Observational Seatbelt Survey Form

Community: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Start time: \_\_\_\_\_

Surveyor: \_\_\_\_\_

End time: \_\_\_\_\_

No.	Driver Gender		Driver Belted		Pass. Belted		Other Observations
	M	F	Y	N	Y	N	
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							
23							
24							
25							
26							
27							
28							
29							
30							
Total							

No.	Driver Gender		Driver Belted		Pass. Belted		Other Observations
	M	F	Y	N	Y	N	
31							
32							
33							
34							
35							
36							
37							
38							
39							
40							
41							
42							
43							
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53							
54							
55							
56							
57							
58							
59							
60							
Total							