

UTAH RURAL SAFETY BELT USE SURVEY

SEPTEMBER 2008 REPORT

BACKGROUND

Utah presents as a unique state because of its geography and population distribution. The state is the eleventh largest in the United States, encompassing an area of 84,916 square miles, and the census for the year of 2000 was 2,233,169. Utah has a varied geographic distribution of its population, with large rural and frontier areas. Approximately three-quarters of Utah's population lives within the four counties clustered against the Wasatch Mountains (Salt Lake, Utah, Davis and Weber Counties). This leaves the remaining 25 counties contributing less than one-quarter to the state's population.

Since 1986, the Utah Highway Safety Office (UHSO) has conducted an annual safety belt observational survey with results showing an increase in belt use from 18% to the current rate of 86%. The methodology for conducting surveys from 1986 to 1998 was based on guidelines specific to Utah. In 1998, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) began to award the states federal funds based on their statewide safety belt use rates and established new survey criteria. In turn, the states were required to develop new methodology that was approved by NHTSA, which included studying safety belt use in the largest geographic areas containing at least 85 percent of the state's population. In Utah, this meant that safety belt usage would be studied in the six most populated counties (Cache, Davis, Salt Lake, Utah, Washington, and Weber). This annual study provides NHTSA with a state safety belt usage rate and is also used to help establish a national rate, which was reported as 83% in 2007.

Although the NHTSA-approved statewide survey provides Utah with a safety belt use rate that represents the majority of the population, it does not provide adequate data on rural belt use. Historically, rural communities have lower safety belt use rates than urban areas. To better understand statewide safety belt use and provide state and local programs with relevant data, the UHSO conducted a rural survey in December 2003 and again in June 2008.

The Rural Safety Belt Observational Survey was conducted in ten counties with populations above 12,000 (Box Elder, Carbon, Iron, San Juan, San Pete, Sevier, Summit, Tooele, Uintah, and Wasatch). The NHTSA-approved methodology for conducting the annual statewide study was reviewed and modified to meet the needs of the rural study. This enables the state to compare rural and urban use rates.

RESULTS

The results of the survey indicate that the overall safety belt use rate in the ten rural counties studied is **63.8%**.

When comparing rural and urban safety belt use rates, motorists in urban counties buckle up more often (86.0%) than those in rural areas. This demonstrates a 22.2 percentage point difference in belt use between urban and rural counties. These results are provided in Figure 1.

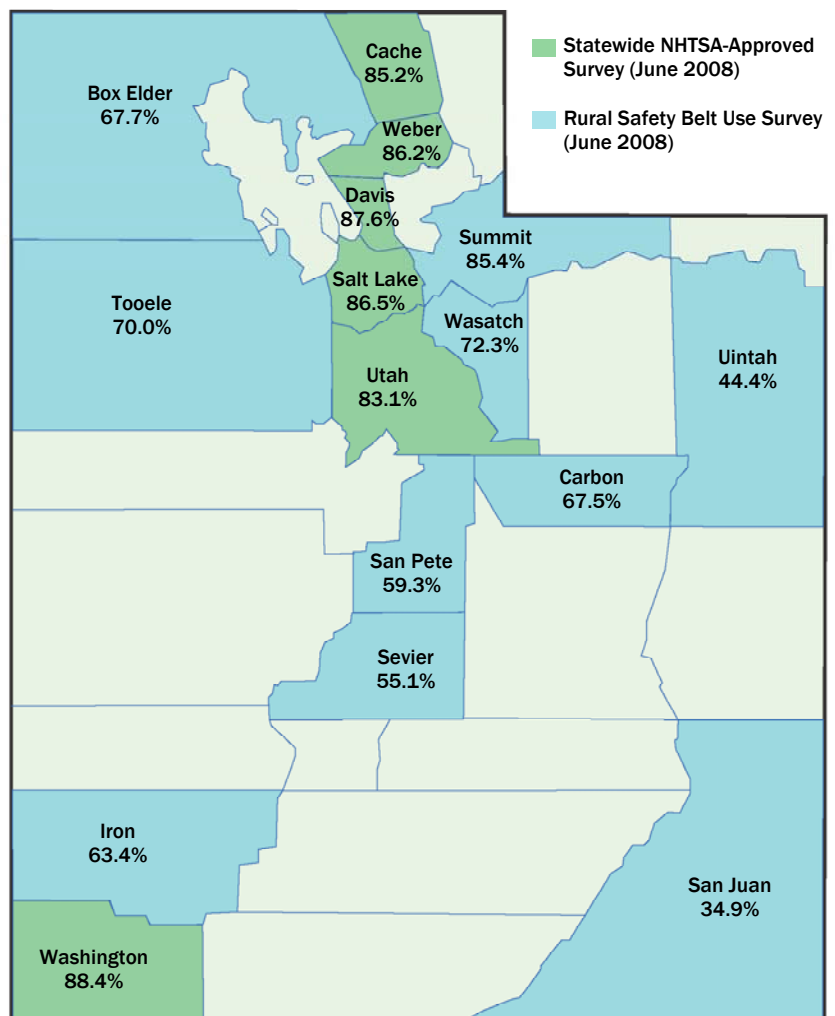


Figure 1

Safety Belt Usage by Rural County Utah (2003, 2008)

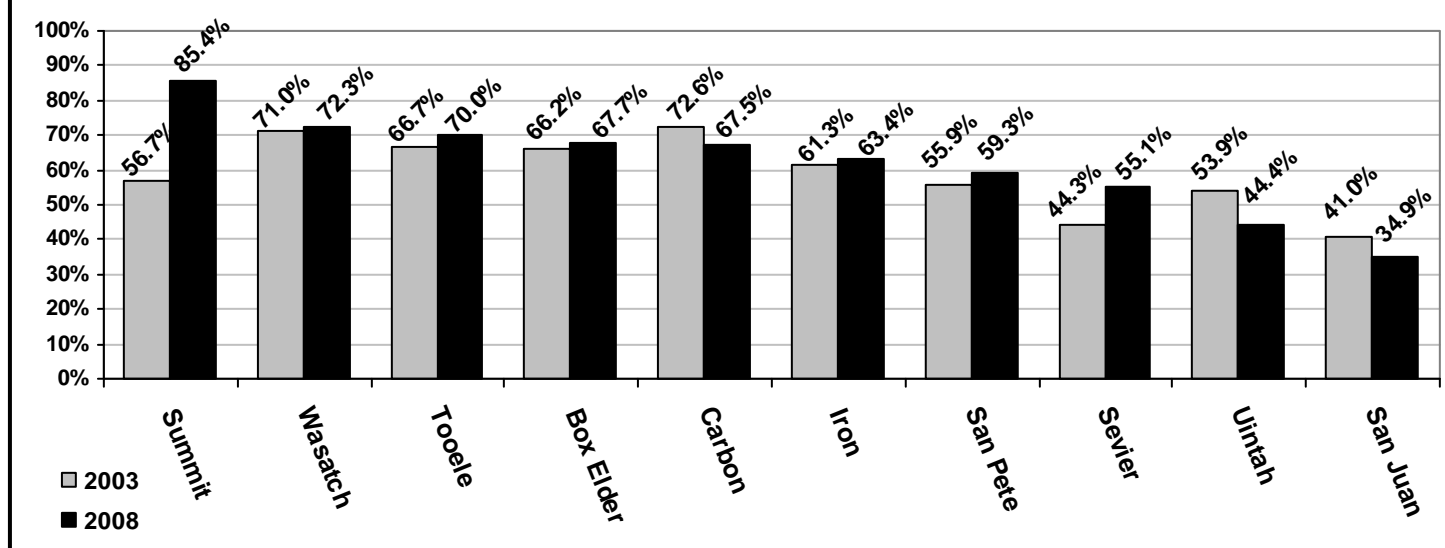


Figure 2

When comparing the 2003 and 2008 safety belt use rates, the study shows that belt use increased 5.9 percentage points from the 2003 rate of 57.9%. Results of the 2003 and 2008 surveys, by county, are provided in Figure 2.

When comparing belt use among male and female drivers and front seat passengers, it was determined that females were more likely to wear safety belts than males. Females buckled up 89.4% of the time, whereas 83.7% of males used seat belts. The results for safety belt usage among male and female occupants in 2008 are summarized by county in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Safety Belt Use Among Male and Female Occupants by Rural County (2008)

COUNTY	MALE OCCUPANTS	FEMALE OCCUPANTS
Box Elder	63.8%	73.7%
Carbon	64.4%	70.3%
Iron	55.5%	73.3%
San Juan	35.0%	34.8%
San Pete	54.0%	65.4%
Sevier	50.8%	59.1%
Summit	81.9%	89.8%
Tooele	66.5%	73.7%
Uintah	37.6%	53.4%
Wasatch	71.9%	72.9%
Overall	59.9%	68.4%

CONCLUSIONS

- The overall rate of adult safety belt use in selected rural counties is 63.8% +/- 0.68%.
- Summit County has the highest rate of safety belt use at 85.4%.
- Three of the next highest scoring counties (Wasatch, Tooele, and Box Elder) are located adjacent to more urban counties that have been shown to have relatively high safety belt use rates.
- As observed in more urban counties, women in rural counties tend to have higher use rates than men. In general, the rankings of counties among women are similar to those among men. With Summit County having the highest use rates in both categories.
- The difference between use rates for men and women is most pronounced in Iron County where the use rate for women is 73.3% and only 55.5% for men.
- Similarly, in Uintah County the use rate for women is 53.4% and only 37.6% for men.
- In San Juan and Wasatch Counties, use rates for both men and women are similar at about 35% (San Juan) and 72% (Wasatch).
- When comparing the 2008 and 2003 use rates, Summit County had the largest increase (28.7%).
- Three of the ten counties showed decreases in belt use from 2003 to 2008 (Carbon, Uintah, and San Juan).