

Cross Safely Drive Safely



Problem

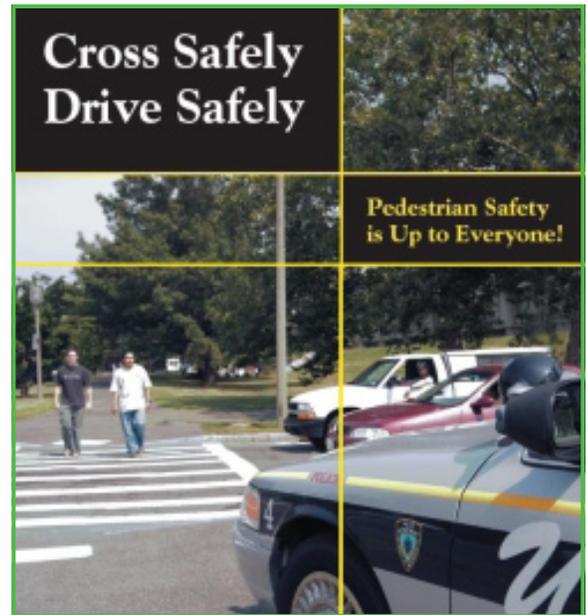
People walk and drive on college campuses — sometimes with unexpected results. In the late 1990s, two pedestrians at UMass died when cars struck them in crosswalks. Each academic year at Amherst since 2000, car drivers seriously injured four pedestrians on average. Police sought ways to prevent future pedestrian fatalities and injuries.

Background

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst is the flagship campus of the UMass system. During the academic year over 32,000 people — students, faculty, staff and guests — are on campus every day. Many of them commute and park away from the center of campus, becoming pedestrians after they park their cars. Others walk to academic buildings from their residential living areas. When the Mullins Center (11,000 seats) or Warren McQuirk Stadium (about 20,000 seats) hosts an event, the pedestrian population is even larger.

The UMass Police Department consists of 63 officers. When they received complaints from pedestrians, the police reacted by sending a cruiser to patrol a crosswalk area for a few days. This provided general deterrence for a short time, but didn't solve the problem.

UMassSAFE is a partnership between the Governor's Highway Safety Bureau (GHSB) and the UMass College of Engineering Transportation Center. A transportation research program, its mission is to reduce crashes and crash injuries through research and applied practice. UMassSAFE knew about the campus' pedestrian safety issue and approached the UMass Police about collaborating to solve the problem.



This poster was widely distributed around the UMass-Amherst campus.

Solution

In 2005, with funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the UMass Police and UMassSAFE worked together to develop and implement the “Cross Safely Drive Safely” program, which included education, enforcement, and evaluation.

The education component included both a public awareness campaign and judicial education. In an important preliminary step, police met with a local judge to discuss the program's parameters, ensuring that later enforcement efforts would likely stand up in court. The public awareness campaign targeted both pedestrians and motorists. Messages on posters and bus cards, reinforced by media coverage, reminded pedestrians to walk safely. Patrols of two officers spent four hours at a time monitoring motorist behavior at crosswalks. (The patrols concentrated on uncontrolled crosswalks that were the subjects of previous complaints.) A plainclothes decoy at the crosswalk radioed ahead to a partner in a cruiser when the decoy saw a violation. During the first month, officers stopped violators and advised them that they had committed an offense. Instead of a citation, violators received a handout with operator and pedestrian safety tips.

Cross Safely Drive Safely — Amherst, MA

During the second month of the program, motorists were ticketed and assessed a fine (fines ranged from \$35 to \$200 depending on the violation). This was publicized in the local media and on bus cards on UMass transit vehicles. News of the enforcement campaign spread quickly throughout Amherst by word-of-mouth.

The education/enforcement campaign took place early in the 2005-06 academic year. The NHTSA grant provided enough money to repeat the program in the fall of 2006. To evaluate the program, UMassSAFE researchers observed before and after pedestrian crossing behavior and driver compliance at the patrolled crosswalks and at two off-campus control sites.



Large-scale cards on the side of UMass transit buses reiterated the “Cross Safely Drive Safely” idea and included crossing safety tips for pedestrians.

Results

Pedestrian/car crashes still occurred at UMass after the 2005 program cycle; however, evaluation showed that more drivers were yielding to pedestrians at the targeted crosswalks during and after the education/enforcement period. After the next cycle, there were no pedestrian/motor vehicle crashes or injuries from September 2006 to June 2007. In addition, the campaign made patrol officers more aware of crosswalk violations resulting in a higher level of routine enforcement since the start of the effort. The police plan to continue the campaign because of the UMass community’s cyclical nature (new students arrive every fall) even though no more grant funds are available. UMass SAFE is developing a curriculum that can be used to train law enforcement officers on other large university campuses.

Costs

The NHTSA grant totaled \$75,000, divided between the police and UMassSAFE. The police used their share mainly to pay for the patrol officers’ overtime and for printing materials. The police also contributed an officer’s time spent as program supervisor and his travel to Rochester, Boston and Madison to present the program in other locations. (A PowerPoint presentation can be viewed at <http://www.bikewalk.net/presentations/davidblack.ppt>)

Contact

David A. Black, Sergeant
University of Massachusetts Police Department
351 Hicks Way,
Amherst, MA 01003
(413) 545-2121
dblack@admin.umass.edu

Image sources

Poster, UMass Creative Services; photo, Heather Rothenberg.

For more information, please visit the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center Web site at www.walkinginfo.org.

