

WASHINGTON

El Protector

▶ AT-A-GLANCE

▶ **Project Characteristics**
Innovative
Traffic Safety in the Hispanic
Community

▶ **Program Areas**
Multicultural Outreach
Community/Corridor Traffic
Safety

▶ **Targeted Populations**
Hispanic Community

▶ **Type of Jurisdiction**
County

▶ **Jurisdiction Size**
223,800

▶ **Funding**
WA Traffic Safety
Commission: \$29,488
Mabton Police Dept: \$6,800

▶ **Contact**
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Problem Identification

Historically, Yakima County has a death rate that is, at times, nearly twice that of Washington State's average. In 1999 and 2000, 36 percent of the drinking driver deaths in Yakima County were Hispanic drivers. This data mirrors nationwide data indicating that the incidence of fatal motor vehicle collisions and other serious traffic safety violation is significantly higher among the Hispanic population. Limited availability of traffic safety and driver education information in Spanish, limited resources and funds to focus on this high-risk group, in addition to limited English proficiency and cultural differences could contribute to certain unsafe driving behaviors, including not wearing seat belts, driving under the influence, and speeding, causing an over-representation of Hispanics in highway fatalities.

Goals and Objectives

El Protector is a bilingual/bicultural program that provides public education through dialogue with the Hispanic community. The goal of the El Protector program is to reduce the rate of motor vehicle deaths and injuries among the Mabton Hispanic community.

The program's objectives are to:

- Reduce the incidence of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs and of speeding;
- Improve seat belt, car seat, and booster seat compliance;
- Increase the number of Hispanics with valid driver's licenses;
- Improve the Hispanic community's understanding of the importance of traffic safety rules and encourage positive traffic safety behavior; and
- Build better community relations between the Hispanic community and law enforcement agencies.

Strategies and Activities

The El Protector program implemented the following strategies and related activities to achieve its goals and objectives:

- Hosted community events, such as a Movie Night with a potluck dinner, which were designed to build better community relations between the Hispanic community and law enforcement.
- Projected the image that El Protector could be a neighbor or relative by having officers wear street clothes rather than uniforms, thereby making the officers appear more approachable.

- Made presentations to the Hispanic community regarding seat belt laws, correct use of child safety seats, etc.
- Offered driver's education classes in Spanish in cooperation with the Department of Licensing as well as created a PowerPoint™ presentation in Spanish to review the driver's handbook and a Spanish Video that walks an applicant through the driver's license application process.
- Distributed car seats and booster seats to low income Hispanic families and required all recipients to attend a child safety training class.
- Displayed posters in areas frequented by the Hispanic Community, including schools, churches, and clinics.
- Collaborated with various churches, media outlets, government agencies and programs such as 1-800-BUCKL-UP.
- Created radio and television Public Service Announcements and aired them on Spanish radio and television stations.
- Sent letters from the Police Chief to the Hispanic community introducing the goals of the program.
- Created Spanish/bilingual traffic safety pamphlets.
- Developed and distributed a Spanish traffic safety coloring book and created educational material in Spanish with traffic safety messages.

Results

The El Protector program achieved the following results after two years:

- Reduced Hispanic drivers' involvement in fatal crashes. The fatality rate dropped from a pre-project level of 65 percent to 33 percent in the first year and 42 percent in the second year.
- Improved community relations with the police.
- Increased recruitment of Hispanic/Latino police officers.
- Spawned a train the trainer course that is being developed for the Department of Licensing to use in other Hispanic communities.
- Planned expansion of the program to encompass the entire county.