

Breakout 16: Today's Occupant Protection Issues for Texas

Moderator: Sam Sinclair, Texas Department of Transportation

Session Summary:

The three presenters in this session each covered a topic that is a current emphasis in the area of occupant protection. Specific to Texas, the passage of a booster seat bill is a high priority for safety advocates as Texas is one of a small number of states with a child passenger restraint law that does not include booster age/size children. With regard to older children, vehicle occupants between 10 and 13 years-old have recently become a major focus because they have typically outgrown child safety seats, including booster seats, and are prone to move into the front seat position, where they are unnecessarily at increased risk. And last, while safety belt use has risen to impressive levels nationally and even more so in Texas over the past decade, fatality data show substantially lower usage rates at night.

Texas does not have a booster seat law, but one has been pre-filed for the upcoming legislative session. Ms. Yuma's presentation covered crash dynamics and the importance of booster seat laws. She gave historical information on previous attempts to pass a booster seat law in Texas and some of the reasons for past failures. Her presentation included a thorough description of the elements of the current bill and what is being done to support its passage.

Ms. Wheeler described a program in Austin that focused on educating 'tweens' to ride in the back seat properly restrained. An event was held with 46 participating tweens. Pre and post knowledge surveys were conducted. The presentation described the components of the event, the results of the data collection, and future plans for implementing the program.

Ms. Womack's, presentation focused on the need for measuring nighttime safety belt use. The challenges associated with data collection and the technology used in other states were described. Ms. Womack presented the survey approach and results from nighttime data collected in 4 Texas cities in 2008. The presentation concluded with a summary of lessons learned and plans for future surveys.