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EVALUATION OF THE *AGGRESSION SUPPRESSION* PROGRAM, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

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This safety initiative describes a traffic safety demonstration project in the city of Milwaukee, in the State of Wisconsin (United States of America), in 1999. In October 1998, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an agency in the U.S. Department of Transportation, awarded the first federally funded Aggressive Driving Demonstration Program to the Police Department of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which had competed for the grant against law enforcement agencies in 26 other metropolitan areas of the United States.

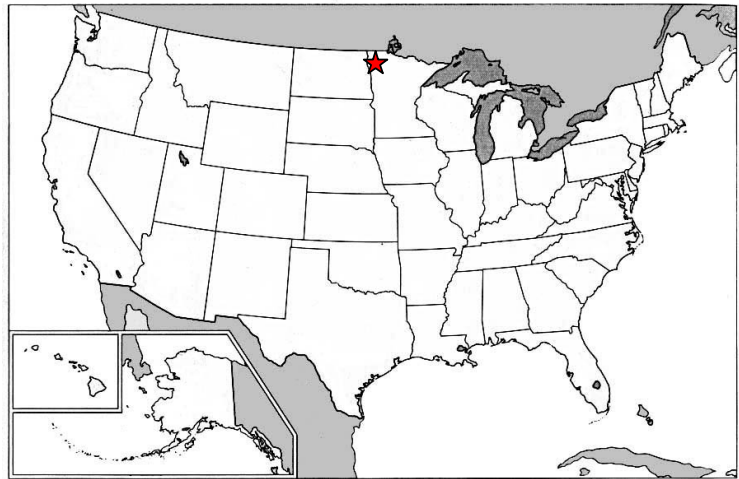
Several factors contributed to Milwaukee's selection for the project. The city had previously mounted a comprehensive traffic safety plan as well as numerous special traffic enforcement projects. Extensive historical crash and traffic violation data were available to help project planners select special locations for the project's intensive police enforcement. The Milwaukee project would also complement an already existing statewide program against aggressive driving that had been implemented by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Finally, an evaluation component in the project would ensure that information would be obtained about strategies that were successful and unsuccessful in detecting and deterring aggressive driving offenses.

The 18-month Milwaukee demonstration project was designed to study aggressive driving, and then provide the results of the police enforcement actions and the supporting public information activity to law enforcement agencies across the United States. The project's total grant of \$650,241 included a local funding contribution of \$173,716.

The goals of the Milwaukee project were to develop and evaluate an innovative enforcement strategy to reduce aggressive driving, and to develop and evaluate public information and education programs that were designed to discourage aggressive driving.

The City of Milwaukee

The City of Milwaukee is generally recognized as one of the great beer brewing centers of the world, and it has been home for a century or more to several prominent beer makers in America. The city has an estimated 597,000 people, and it is part of Milwaukee County with almost 960,000 people. The latest population census shows the State of Wisconsin has about 5.5 million residents.



Milwaukee is Wisconsin's largest city, and it is 20th in size among U.S. cities. Milwaukee's population has declined by almost nine percent in recent years, while its neighboring counties have grown. There is a population shift, which reflects movement from the city into surrounding suburbs and sub-rural areas. Like other urban areas in the world, these population trends are influenced by factors such as economics, transportation and living patterns. Milwaukee remains vibrant and important, and it offered an appropriate location for conducting the aggressive driving suppression demonstration.

Design of the Project

The project was divided into three six-month phases. The first phase gathered baseline data on driver attitudes, police safety enforcement activity and traffic safety. It also developed the media publicity plan to inform the public about the project as well as the types of driving actions that constitute aggressive driving and the resulting danger to public safety. This first phase also planned the police enforcement schedule to enforce against and deter aggressive driving.

The second phase of the project was devoted to conducting the actual police enforcement effort against aggressive driving. This phase also focused on increasing public awareness about aggressive driving in general, and about the types of traffic violations normally associated with aggressive driving.

The third and final phase provided the time period for evaluation of the effects of the demonstration on traffic safety and public awareness, and for preparation and submission of the evaluation report itself.

The U.S.A.'s Primary Objectives

Aggressive driving is a major public safety problem in the United States, and therefore it is an important priority of the U.S. Government. Consequently, NHTSA had a number of issues that it wanted analyzed during the course of the Milwaukee aggressive driving enforcement demonstration project.

NHTSA wanted the project to help determine whether a highly publicized and intensive law enforcement effort against aggressive driving offenses can result in positive changes in drivers' attitudes and behaviors.

NHTSA also believed it was important to test the willingness and the ability of law enforcement officers to enforce a broader range of aggressive driving behaviors, in addition to the typical enforcement against the aggressive driving action of excessive speed.

For purposes of managing programs to stop aggressive driving, NHTSA defines aggressive driving as a combination of moving traffic offenses by a motorist so as to endanger other persons or property. In addition to excessive speeds, NHTSA has stated this problem includes such offenses as following too closely, changing traffic lanes without signal or caution, running reds lights, refusing to obey stop signs, and improperly passing other motor vehicles.

Milwaukee expanded the offenses it would include in its enforcement actions against aggressive driving to also include offenses such as failure to use a turn signal, failure to yield the right of way, stopping in intersections which caused traffic "gridlock" (which is severe traffic congestion), inappropriate weaving between other vehicles, and improper hand, horn and vocal signals to other motorists.

NHTSA also determined it was important to test the feasibility and effectiveness of alternative public awareness and enforcement strategies, including the use of innovative technologies for the purpose of detecting aggressive driving actions. These innovations would include use of video cameras to document offenses, lasers to measure vehicle speeds and electronic signs to advise motorists of their travel speeds.

NHTSA also considered it important to further describe and state the information available to show how U.S. cities and other local jurisdictions, including counties, define and measure aggressive driving actions in their respective locations.

Description of the Project

This demonstration project was planned and coordinated by the City of Milwaukee Safety Commission. The Commission functions as the Safety Division of the Milwaukee Police Department. It is also responsible for developing and implementing supporting public awareness efforts.

An advisory committee also helped plan and guide the project. In the Milwaukee area, there are several separate police agencies. Therefore this committee consisted of representatives from Milwaukee's Police Department; the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office; three suburban police enforcement agencies; the Wisconsin State Department of Transportation; the Milwaukee Public Works Office; and the Preusser Research Group, Inc., of Trumbull, CT, which served as the project's contractor and conducted the evaluation of the project's results.

Project Implementation and Activity

After planning and introductory work was complete, the City of Milwaukee on March 30, 1999, launched a campaign named the *Aggression Suppression* Program, which was the enforcement and public information and education phase of the project. This second phase (a six-month effort) was coordinated by the Milwaukee Safety Commission. It combined a number of elements. These included intensified general enforcement (focused on normal enforcement) and targeted innovative enforcement, which incorporated innovative enforcement strategies and technologies. Also included was publicity to tell people about the increase in police officers and why there was increased enforcement activity, as well as the dangers of aggressive driving.

The public awareness campaign focused on trends in driver behavior and attitudes, and changes detected over the course of the project. The public was also surveyed to learn about their awareness of the various media and program themes used in various project phases. This media effort was coordinated with police enforcement's overall strategy of targeting particular aggressive driving offenses at specific locations where these types of offenses were known to occur, and at times of heavy traffic congestion.

This phase also focused on innovative enforcement technologies used to detect, apprehend and convict violators. These included video cameras installed in police vehicles, plain clothes observers placed at roadway intersections to spot motorist offenses, laser speed detection devices, laser devices able to measure the distance between cars, electronic display boards to show traveling speeds for motorists, and use of non-traditional police patrol vehicles.

Police also used magnetic vehicle signs. When police stopped motorists for aggressive driving, a magnetic sign saying "Aggressive Driving Patrol" was placed on the rear of the patrol vehicle to warn passing motorists that enforcement activity was underway. In support of innovative enforcement techniques, police officers also received training in detecting and substantiating aggressive driving offenses. This training included use of laser devices to measure factors such as vehicle speed and the distances between vehicles.

After the enforcement "kick-off" effort, the remainder of the six-month enforcement program was organized into a series of three-week enforcement and publicity "sub-theme" campaigns. These smaller efforts focused on specific traffic offenses generally associated with aggressive driving. Each of these efforts had its own slogan and was initiated with a press conference, and several are described briefly later in this document. The goal was to change the attitude and behavior of all Milwaukee drivers, and enforcement actions were targeted to specific high-crash roadway corridors and intersections, and to times of heavy traffic congestion.

The Results of the Project

All 20 enforcement agencies in Milwaukee City and Milwaukee County participated in both media publicity and enforcement. The project funded 5,700 hours of patrol and 900 hours of administration by the City Police Department, and 2,215 hours of patrol by the County Sheriff. Three other suburban police agencies carried out 1,200 hours of aggressive driving enforcement, supported by a separate Federal highway safety grant. Fifteen other police agencies participated without special funding or grants.

Considerable media coverage was generated, especially at the beginning “kick-off” of the project. This event was attended by all four local television stations, the major daily newspaper, a suburban weekly newspaper, and two radio stations. The project’s press release and other materials designed to build awareness of the project were mailed to 400 companies that were major employers in the area, and to high schools, driver education schools and companies operating school buses.

The project also adopted the use of sub-theme efforts to help sustain media interest, which in turn helped generate large “buy-in” interest by police agencies. Each of the sub-theme media campaigns addressed a particular type of aggressive driving offense. The publicity plan called for a series of eight public awareness campaigns, with each lasting three weeks. Each campaign called public attention to a specific offense emphasized in the police enforcement actions. A slogan to gain public attention was created for each theme. For example, the campaign to encourage motorists to use their turn signals (“flashers”) was entitled the “Flasher Patrol.” Each of the eight campaigns was launched with a press conference hosted by a participating law enforcement agency.

One of the central elements of the project was the selection of special traffic corridors where the application of intensive police enforcement against aggressive driving offenses would take place. The selection of these special corridors was based on a review of historical crash data and traffic offense citation data for the City of Milwaukee.

These special corridors were located on roadways with high traffic volume, and with at least 20 crashes involving aggressive driving actions (such as excessive speeds for conditions, failure to yield right of way and disregarding traffic signals) during the three-year period prior to the project. Milwaukee also selected special roadway intersections. These intersections had each experienced at least 35 aggressive driving-related crashes during the prior three years.

The project succeeded in targeting enforcement at these special locations, and it was also successful in broadening the police enforcement effort to target a wide variety of aggressive driving actions. This expanded the range of citations issued to also go beyond the previous emphasis on excessive speeds. Therefore, the non-speed violation citations by the City of Milwaukee police increased 29.9 percent, and by the Sheriff’s Office 55.2 percent. These additional violations being cited by police included disregarding traffic signals and signs, failure to yield right of way, reckless driving actions and other moving violations. The number of speed-related citations either remained about the same as before the *Aggressive Suppression Campaign* or declined slightly.

There was a reduction in all crashes reported to the police during the project. Citywide, the total number of injury and fatality crashes was down 6.6 percent, and total crashes declined by almost 5 percent. By comparison, in the project’s special corridors targeted for aggressive driving enforcement, fatal and injury crashes were down 11.3 percent, and total crashes declined by 12.3 percent. In the comparison corridors, used for evaluation purposes, injury and fatal crashes were down by only 1.2 percent and total crashes by only 2.2 percent.

In the United States, general deterrence is one of the important aims of these types of law enforcement projects. Consequently, it was important in the project to survey driver self-reported measures of attitudes and behaviors to determine the extent of the project’s impact. Drivers in the mid-program survey believed it more likely than in the pre-program survey that police would stop

them for running a red light or disregarding a stop sign, and that such traffic offenses constituted a safety problem.

The evaluation of project results concluded, however, that the level of public awareness of the specific campaign themes was relatively low in all three waves of the survey, although statistically significant increases were reported for several of the awareness campaigns. It was further concluded that a more intense and focused media campaign might be necessary to produce greater changes in public awareness.

Final Observations and Thoughts

The *Aggression Suppression* Program demonstrated the effects of targeted police enforcement. Citations were issued by police for more aggressive driving violation types than solely exceeding posted speed limits or driving faster than conditions permit. As mentioned previously, an important goal of the demonstration had been to enforce against a broad variety of aggressive driving actions. Changes in motorist behavior were also noted at targeted intersections, and crash reductions were noted citywide, with larger reductions on roadway corridors with targeted police enforcement. It was concluded that aggressive driving enforcement programs of this type would be enhanced if they were able to create more visible and focused media attention.
