

ALABAMA'S

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

HEALTH

VOLUME 34

NUMBER 6

FEBRUARY 2001

State safety belt usage rate reaches the national average for the first time

Observational surveys conducted by the Alabama Department of Public Health find that Alabama's safety belt usage rates in 2000 increased to the highest rate ever recorded in the state. The estimated safety belt usage rate was 71 percent, a 22 percent increase from the 1999 survey result of just 58 percent. Child restraint usage rates increased by 28 percent, rising from 60 percent in 1999 to 77 percent in 2000.

"Safety belts save lives. We have proof of this with safety belt usage increasing to a record level last year," commented Gov. Don Siegelman. "Remember, every time, every trip, every day, buckle up. It's the law."

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We are very pleased that Alabama's motor vehicle occupants have made this behavior change. This puts Alabama directly in line with the national average for the first time ever, and we attribute this increase to enforcement of the primary seat belt law. Surveyors began seeing the positive effects of the law last January."

During 1999 the Alabama Legislature enacted legislation which made failure to wear safety belts a primary offense. A primary violation is one in which drivers can be stopped only on the basis of not wearing safety belts. Law enforcement officers began assessing fines for primary offenses in December 1999.

At a news conference on Jan. 17, Dr. Williamson thanked Rep. Jack Hawkins of Jefferson County for his untiring efforts in the introduction and successful passage of safety belt legislation. Rep. Hawkins is proposing legislation in the 2001 regular session to require safety belts for back seat passengers.

Milton Saffold, Program Manager for the Law

Enforcement and Traffic Safety Division, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, also brought the issue on a personal basis, stating that he had himself been saved by wearing a safety belt. He also related a tragic incident in which the driver of a vehicle on Interstate 65, who was buckled up, survived crashing into a tree while his two unbelted back seat passengers perished.

Connie Beasley, Regional Program Manager for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, also addressed the importance of safety belt usage and how her agency supports this cause.

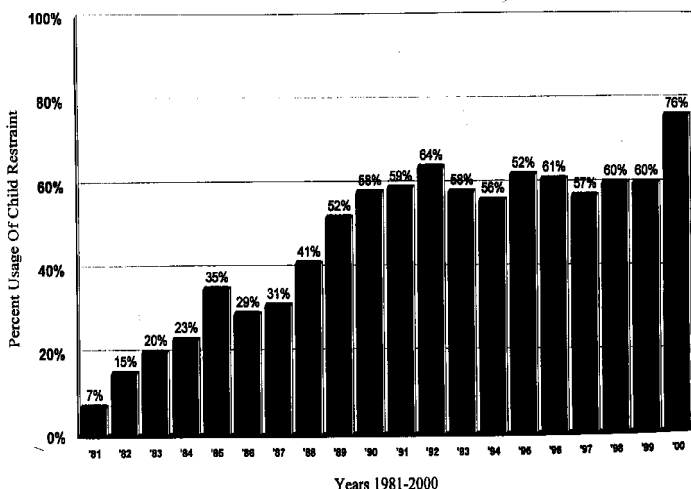
Safety belt restraint usage was observed for 79,000 drivers and passengers within 15 Alabama counties in the 2000 observational survey. Colbert and Madison counties each had a 78 percent safety belt usage rate, the highest rates of the surveyed counties. Houston and Jefferson counties had a 76 percent and 75 percent safety belt usage rate, respectively, the second and third highest rates of the surveyed counties. Among the counties surveyed, all except Escambia (at 51 percent, down from 53 percent in 1999) improved from last year's usage rate.

Safety belt usage rates for other counties surveyed for the year 2000 were as follows: Blount, 63 percent; Etowah, 64 percent; Lawrence, 71 percent; Lee, 70 percent; Marshall, 70 percent; Mobile, 67 percent; Montgomery, 74 percent; Shelby, 73 percent; Tuscaloosa, 72 percent; and Walker 64 percent.

Houston and Colbert counties' child restraint usage rates were 88 percent and 86 percent respectively,

Safety.....continued on page 2

Estimated Child Restraint Usage In Alabama By Year (1981-2000)



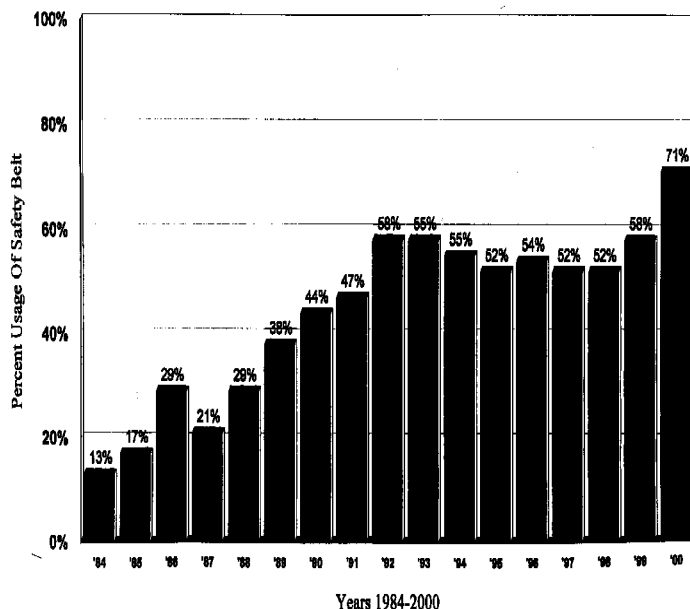
while Escambia County's usage rate averaged only 61 percent. The survey also included motorcycle helmet usage. Of the 161 persons observed on motorcycles, all were wearing helmets, the same as the 1997, 1998 and 1999 rates of 100 percent.

The Injury Prevention Division of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease conducts the annual survey of safety belt, child restraint and motorcycle helmet usage. The year 2000 marked the eleventh year that the required National Highway Traffic Safety Administration guidelines were followed for the surveillance procedures.

In this scientifically drawn and conducted sample, data for all areas of the state from small town, to county, to urban roadways are included. Fifteen counties actually compose the entire survey area, including the four

metropolitan counties of Jefferson, Madison, Mobile and Montgomery. The other 11 counties were randomly selected from a pool of the 37 largest counties. A majority

Estimated Safety Belt Usage In Alabama By Year (1984-2000)



of Alabama residents are in the sample pool, because 85 percent of the state's population lies within these 37 counties.

Three hundred forty-five sites were selected and observed for one hour to determine the number of people in the front outboard seat, the number of occupants wearing safety belts, the number of children under the age of 6 in any position in the car and the number of these children who were restrained.

ALABAMA'S HEALTH

Alabama's Health is an official monthly publication of the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. If you would like to receive the publication or wish to submit information for future articles, please telephone requests to (334) 206-5300. Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to the Alabama Department of Public Health. The department's web site is <<http://www.alapubhealth.org>>

Donald E. Williamson, M.D. State Health Officer
 Jim McVay, Dr. P.A. Director, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease
 Arrol Sheehan, M.A. Editor
 Geraldine Rose Daniels, J.D. Contributing Editor
 Toni Prater Graphic Designer
 Marion Wilford Photographer

Informational materials in alternative formats will be made available upon request..

Department sets new record for giving

For the first time in its history, the Alabama Department of Public Health reached its goal in the Alabama State Employees Combined Campaign.

“This speaks volumes about what this department is about,” Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said in presenting a certificate to Chairperson Carol Mysinger and Tracy Klein. “For the first time ever, we received the Gold Award.”

The department reached 104.79 percent of its annual goal. The award was presented “in appreciation for superior achievement and outstanding leadership in the State Combined Campaign.”

The Video Communications Division used its skills to prepare a videotape for the campaign. Diane Shepherd of the Bureau of Family Health Services also was honored as program ambassador for volunteering to appear in the campaign videotape presentation. She discussed how United Way had helped her family.

Donations to the Combined Campaign assist many organizations that make a difference for those in need. These donations will help give young children better opportunities for mental and physical health. These donations will touch many, many lives.

Dr. Williamson said next year the public health areas intend to challenge the state in giving, even though there are 3,000 employees at the area/county levels and just 800 at



Dr. Donald Williamson presents the Gold Award certificate to Carol Mysinger (center) and Tracy Klein for the department’s achievement of its goal in the Alabama State Employees Combined Campaign.

the central office. He urged broader participation among all employees to meet our goals in the future.

Publications win national awards

The National Public Health Information Coalition recognized two publications of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease at its annual meeting in Denver, Colo. Dr. Jim McVay, bureau director, accepted the awards “for excellence in public health communication” on the department’s behalf.

At his December staff meeting, Dr. Donald Williamson presented one award to the Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program for its *Women’s Health Guide*. Present to accept the silver certificate were Viki Brant, M.P.A., director of the Cancer Prevention Branch, Chronic Disease Prevention Division, and health educator Savannah Harris.

The department’s 1998 Annual Report was also recognized with an award for excellence in public health communication. Accepting the certificate for the department were Geraldine Rose Daniels, Sally Palmer and Arrol Sheehan.

Factors considered in the judging of this annual awards

competition included target audience, objectives and budget.



Viki Brant (left) and Savannah Harris accept the NPHIC award.

Alabama to provide new vaccine for children

Vaccine shipments of Prevnar arriving soon

Each year in the U.S., the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae* causes approximately 700 cases of meningitis and 17,000 cases of blood infections and other serious diseases such as pneumonia, sinusitis and middle ear infections. This results in the deaths of 200 children under the age of 5.

A new pneumococcal conjugate vaccine called Prevnar will help protect infants and young children from the threat of these serious and sometimes deadly diseases. Prevnar protects against the pneumococcus bacteria, which causes meningitis, pneumonia, sinusitis, middle ear infections and bloodstream infections. This highly effective but expensive vaccine is for children between 2 and 59 months of age and costs \$45 per dose, with one to four doses required, depending on the age of the child.

At a cost of \$1.4 million the Alabama Department of Public Health has purchased over 31,000 doses of Prevnar vaccine, which will be administered in county health department clinics. Additional doses of Prevnar, obtained through the federally funded Vaccines for Children program, will also be provided to the hundreds of enrolled physicians in the state.

Prevnar was approved in February 2000 and is now recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family

Physicians. Physicians enrolled in the Vaccines for Children program have already started to receive their vaccine and county health departments are expected to begin to receive their vaccine shipments around Feb. 1.

Gov. Don Siegelman said, "Alabama will do everything possible to protect our youngest children from the threat of infectious disease. We will make sure our children grow up healthy, so they can learn and flourish. This program will save money and save families the anguish of seeing their children suffer."

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We are pleased to provide this additional vaccine for children to protect them from the germ *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The vaccine will help prevent pneumonia, ear infections and other illnesses caused by this germ."

The vaccine should be administered at 2, 4 and 6 months of age with a usual interval of two months between doses. A subsequent dose is recommended at 12 to 15 months of age.

A California study found that the vaccine was 90 percent effective in preventing invasive pneumococcal disease, including pneumonia, among the children studied. Children who received the new vaccine also had 7 percent fewer visits to the doctor for middle ear infections and a 20 percent decrease in the number of tympanostomy tubes (ear tubes) placed.

Health Department's Support Desk offers a helping hand

Have you ever had a computer problem that you couldn't solve and needed help? If so, you probably called 334-206-5268 and talked with someone at the Health Department's Support Desk.

The Support Desk handles technical support for software, hardware or networking problems for departmental programs statewide including area and county offices. A trained computer staff of five constantly take work orders by telephone from employees for problems involving work stations, computers, laptops, printers, desktop applications, Internet connections, telephones, telephone lines, electronic mail, networking, Information Technology Purchasing, and PHALCON or Public Health of Alabama County Operations Network.

Eric Rudolph, Support Desk Manager, said that the average time it takes to complete one work order could be 15 to 40 minutes for a simple call and 40 minutes to four hours

for a complicated work order.

"We use software that enables us to assess and communicate with computers of department employees in other locations in the building and in other counties," said Rudolph. "We see what employees reporting the problem see so that we can quickly analyze and solve the problem."

Although Rudolph encourages employees to call the Support Desk to get help with computer problems, he also suggests that employees first check wires and cord connections. Before calling for help, Rudolph said, employees also should try shutting down and then restarting the computer.

In discussing the challenges of managing the Support Desk, Rudolph said, "We appreciate patience. Sometimes it takes a while to answer calls if the server is down. Give

Support.....continued on page 5

Commendations

Health department employees who are listed here have received letters of commendation recently. To recognize other employees, please send letters through your supervisors or the state health officer to *Alabama's Health*.

Pam Barrett

Jim Lynch

Ashley Smith

Pam Vines

PHA 3 TB Program

from Nancy L. Brook, M.P.H.
Montgomery, Ala.

Marge Braden

Larry Ellison

Sue Parker

Debbie Wetzel

Health Provider Standards

from John G. Beard, M.B.A., J.D.
Birmingham, Ala.

Siegfried Harden

Health Promotion and Chronic Disease

from Heidi Hataway
Montgomery, Ala.

Virginia Hill

Center for Health Statistics

from Barbara Ballard
Cindy Corley
Mobile, Ala.

Patricia Mackey, R.N.

Public Health Area 1

from American Cancer Society
Florence, Ala.

Carol Mysinger

Health Promotion and Chronic Disease

from Eli Capilouto, D.M.D., M.P.H., S c.D.
Birmingham, Ala.

Sherry Quinn

Sara Ricaurte

Joyce Roberts

PHA 5 TB Program

from Nancy L. Brook, M.P.H.
Montgomery, Ala.

Pam Reid

Racine Waddell

Katherine Worthy

PHA 6 TB Program

from Nancy L. Brook, M.P.H.
Montgomery, Ala.

Joann B. Robinson

Center for Health Statistics

from Katherine Wilson
Detroit, Mich.

Support.....continued from page 4

us 24 hours before calling to check on a work order.

“We’re working to help everyone. We have to prioritize the major problems such as a server shutting down. We provide the best service possible given the limitations on time and emergencies. We are here to serve.”

According to Chuck Langley, director of the Technical Support Division, “The Support Desk staff members are a great team. They do great work every day by providing the computer and technological needs of various programs and increasing the department’s ability to provide efficient and effective service.”

The hours of operation for the Support Desk are 7:30 a.m. to 4:50 p.m.

By *GERALDINE ROSE DANIELS*

Members of the ADPH Support Desk staff are
Jim Lewandowski, David Newman,
Eric Rudolph, Marcia B. Thomas and
Yolanda Willis.

Retirees listed

The following agency employees retired effective Feb. 1:

Patricia Purdin - Financial Services

Peggy Wood - Computer Systems Center

Sue Yates - Calhoun County Health Department

Racing the Train You'll Be The Loser

A Boeing 747 jetliner lifting off a runway doesn't seem to be moving quickly, but appearances can be deceiving. That aircraft is actually traveling at about 192 miles an hour (309 kilometers an hour).

Trains are another example of huge objects that don't appear to be traveling very fast. Unfortunately, that belief has cost thousands of drivers and pedestrians their lives over the years.

In 1999 there were 399 deaths and 1,360 serious injuries in 3,420 highway/rail grade crossing collisions in the United States. Canada-wide there were 275 crossing incidents in 1998, resulting in 98 deaths, 12 of those at unprotected crossings.

A vehicle or pedestrian is struck by a train in the U.S. about once every two hours. Nearly half those collisions occur at railway crossings equipped with gates, lights and bells.

Drivers who are either impatient and try to beat trains by driving around automatic gates, or aren't paying attention when approaching railway crossings, often pay with their lives.

More than 80 percent of public railroad crossings don't have lights and gates. They often have only crossbuck signs and possibly some advance warning signs. Drivers who are concentrating more on talking on their cell phones or watching the scenery out their side windows than driving can quickly find themselves staring at the last scenery they'll ever see: a train bearing down on them, horn blaring.

A motorist is 40 times more likely to die in a crash involving a train than in one with another motor vehicle. A freight train travelling at 55 miles per hour (90 kilometers an hour) can take a mile or more to stop. It's no contest. In a collision the train always wins.

Here are some other common mistakes drivers make around highway/rail grade crossings:

* Getting their vehicles trapped on train tracks in heavy traffic. Drivers should expect that traffic ahead may suddenly stop and leave themselves room to stop before entering any railroad crossing.

* Believing trains follow set schedules. They often don't and one can appear when you least expect it.

* Some drivers are fatally surprised when, seeing the end of a train go by, they drive around a gate, only to realize there's another set of tracks and another train right there.

* The Federal Highway Administration reports that 6,000 of 60,000 signals fail each month. Don't automatically trust one. Slow down and take a good look for approaching trains before proceeding across.

The good news is The Federal Railway Administration says incidents at railway crossings are declining. Collisions between trains and vehicles or pedestrians now happen about every 100 minutes, compared to every 90 minutes in the past. The bad news is that thousands of needless injuries and hundreds of deaths continue to occur at rail crossings each year. Don't let impatience get the best of you by trying to beat a train. And be extra careful at crossings when driving in low light or bad weather conditions.

Reprinted from *Safety Smart!*, Winter 2001, p.10.

Injury News

Published By

The Alabama Department of Public Health

Injury Prevention Division

Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease

Carol F. Mysinger, M.Ed., M.P.A.....Director

Lynn B. Williams, M.A.....Editor

Funded by a grant from the Law Enforcement and Traffic Safety Division, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

Food and Fitness Program enjoys successful first year

One year ago “Food and Fitness: Healthy Habits for a Lifetime” was begun as a pilot program to improve lifestyle choices in relationship to weight management and physical activity choices for central office employees.

Most similar programs experience only a 5 to 15 percent success rate, but Food and Fitness resulted in weight loss for the year for 38 percent of its participants. Thanks to this success, the state health officer has authorized the continuation of the program through 2001.

“I would encourage everyone to take advantage of Food and Fitness,” said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, who himself lost a significant amount of weight through the program. He was among those recognized at a Central Office staff meeting Jan. 4. He said, “I can really tell the difference.”

Miriam Gaines, director of the Nutrition Section in the Office of Professional and Support Services, regularly conducted programs for participants which were designed to promote sensible weight control and to encourage a more active lifestyle.

Other speakers were tapped to address the group on a variety of fitness and nutrition topics. During the year, employees attended a series of innovative sessions on everything from cardiovascular risk factors to cooking/eating for the holidays. Useful materials were reproduced and provided to participants, and repeat sessions were offered at different times and days of the week to accommodate varying schedule needs.

Each person who chose to participate in Food and Fitness completed a written “readiness to change assessment,” a health assessment form and a behavioral contract. Each was asked to register for an appointment with a nutritionist on staff. Forms were evaluated, and participants were assigned to one of three categories based on risk.

At the outset, participants were individually interviewed and their body weight, percentage of body fat, waist-to-hip ratios and body mass indices were taken and recorded. Weight loss participants were asked to record their weight on a weekly basis. Quarterly confidential interviews were conducted in which individualized plans were discussed. Plenty of encouragement was given by Ms. Gaines as well as by fellow program participants.

From January to December 2000, 97 Montgomery employees participated in part or all of the food and fitness program. Walking competitions and other contests were held to encourage fitness. Participants were reminded to eat five fruits and vegetables daily and to engage in physical activity for at least 30 minutes, five days a week.

An employee advisory committee helped with developing

topics and with the evaluation process. Of the 97 employees registering in early 2000, four left the department, two requested diet counseling as referred by a medical doctor (medical nutrition therapy, not weight loss), one wanted to gain weight, and nine were on the maintenance program to learn healthier eating habits.

So, of the 81 persons who wanted to lose weight, 31 completed the program. The end-of-year results are based on the participants who had their measurements completed by December.

Specifically, nine people lost from .5 to 5 percent of their body weight; eleven lost 6-10 percent of their original body weight; and eleven people lost over 11 percent of their body weight. Two participants lost an amazing 24 percent of their original body weight. The 31 who completed the program lost a total of 654.25 pounds.

“Some employees’ hips are now smaller than their waists were when they started.” Ms. Gaines commented. “I think it

is quite remarkable to make that much of a change.”

Three Financial Services employees made exemplary lifestyle improvements in addition to weight loss. **Brenda Anderson** reached her goal of giving up fried foods, **Carolyn Johnson’s** blood sugar level plummeted from 209 to 118, and **Janet Grafton** made numerous positive lifestyle changes. George Allison of Environmental Services was able to reduce the amount of hypertension medication he was taking after losing weight.

Ms. Gaines gave the credit of the

success of the program to the employees who worked to make positive lifestyle changes a routine part of their lives. Kathy Vincent, staff assistant to the state health officer, credited Ms. Gaines with being “a good cheerleader” who encourages employees to reach their personal food and fitness goals.

Participants who earned the most points by losing weight, reducing their BMI, reducing their body fat percentage, improving their waist-to-hip ratio, attending classes and completing their food and physical activity sheets were as follows: George Allison, Brenda Anderson, Harrell Huff, Carolyn Johnson, Janet Grafton, Ron Pass, Tom White and Janis Pritchett. Honorable mention went to Shirley Bowman and Patricia Purdin. The following were recognized for the weight they lost and kept off: Diane Shepherd, Dr. Donald Williamson, Debbie Williamson, Glenda Harris and Dennis Blair.

If a county or area is interested in implementing this program contact Ms. Gaines by phone (334-206-5649) or e-mail (mgaines@adph.state.al.us).



Finance employees Janet Grafton, Brenda Anderson and Carolyn Johnson were honored.



February is American Heart Month and National Children's Dental Health Month.

Calendar of Events



February 14 Adolescent Health, Public Health Nursing Staff Development, 2-4 pm. For more information contact Fay Smith, (334) 206-5655.



February 21 What Happens When We Monitor: A Look at the National Objectives in Diabetes Care, 1-3 p.m. For more information contact Debra Griffin, (334) 206-2066.



March 1 ADPH Statewide Staff Meeting, 3-4 p.m. For more information contact Jim McVay, Dr.P.A., (334) 206-5600.



March 14 Cardiovascular Health in Children and Adolescents, 2-4 p.m. Public Health Staff Development. For more information contact Fay Smith, (334) 206-5655.



March 21 Home Care for the Patient with Diabetes, Home Health Aide Continuing Education, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Gayla Hollis, (334) 347-2664, extension 403.

April 2-8 National Public Health Week, "Healthy People in Healthy Communities" is the 2001 theme.

April 6-7 Alabama's Choice: Tobacco or Health, Marriott Hotel, Highway 280-459, Birmingham. Open to all. For more information contact Dianne Smith-Yoder, (334) 690-8186.



April 10 Alabama WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, 1-3 p.m. For more information contact Richard Burleson, (334) 206-2929.



April 11 Immunization Update, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Fay Smith, (334) 206-5655.

April 18-20 Alabama Public Health Association Annual Educational Meeting, Marriott Hotel, Space and Rocket Center, Huntsville.

April 26-27 The Second Annual Rural Health Conference, Bryant Conference Center, Tuscaloosa.



May 9 Women's Health, Public Health Staff Development, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Fay Smith, (334) 206-5655.



May 16 Nutrition and Exercise, Home Health Aide Continuing Education, 2-4 p.m. For more information contact Gayla Hollis, (334) 347-2664, extension 403.