EDC

"Watch for Me NC" Combines Education and Enforcement to Improve Pedestrian Safety

North Carolina

KEY ELEMENTS:

Public Education & Engagement

Law Enforcement Training & Support

The Watch for Me NC program is a two-pronged safety initiative that seeks to reduce pedestrian and bicycle crashes through safety messaging and high-visibility traffic enforcement. The program began as a pilot in 2012 with four local agencies and grew to partner with 39 in 2019. A recent program evaluation demonstrated pedestrian crash reductions for participating counties.

BACKGROUND

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) launched Watch for Me NC to combat rising motorist crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists. The program partners with towns, cities, and counties to conduct high-profile traffic safety enforcement operations and promote pedestrian and bicyclist safety through media communications and educational activities.

Watch for Me NC is a competitive statewide program, and the University of North Carolina's (UNC's) Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) provides technical and local implementation assistance. Each winter, NCDOT invites localities to submit program applications wherein towns and

cities must describe both their commitment to promoting pedestrian and bicyclist safety and their capacity for promoting the campaign and coordinating with law enforcement.

Figure 1. Graphic. Watch for Me poster.

The two primary program activities are messaging and law enforcement operations. NCDOT distributes tens of thousands of bumper stickers, bi-lingual rack cards, brochures, banners, and posters with pedestrian and bicycle safety messages across partner communities. For example, bumper stickers include messages like "I brake for people," and rack cards contain general road safety rules such as motorists must yield to people in crosswalks.

NCDOT purchases targeted radio and transit advertisements, maintains a program website, and issues press releases to further spread the program's messages.

The program also provides law enforcement officers with bike lights and reflective bracelets to distribute to children and adults traveling in low-light conditions, creating posi

Figure 2. Photo. Law enforcement participates in Watch for Me event.

The second program component involves law enforcement trainings and traffic safety operations. NCDOT sends experienced traffic safety officers to conduct day-long trainings with local law enforcement in participating communities. During these trainings, local law enforcement refresh their understanding of bicyclist and pedestrian regulations, such as when vehicles must yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk. Law enforcement officers also engage in-field exercises to operationalize these concepts and practice enforcement. After the trainings, police depart
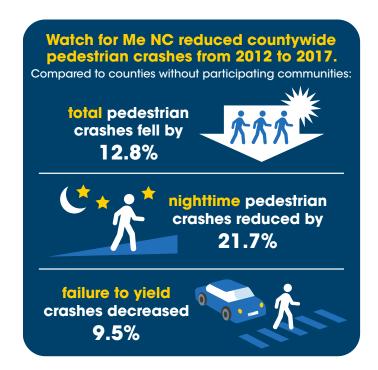
> "The reality is that officers may have days of motor vehicle law and even a smaller portion on pedestrian and bicycle law during their initial training. Now that officers have these [Watch for Me NC trainings], they are able to confidently see and act on violations."
>
> – Sgt. Brian Massengill, Watch for Me NC Trainer

RESULTS

In some cases, enforcement observations led the local agency to install additional countermeasures. For example, the City of Durham upgraded a school crossing from a crosswalk-only to a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon after experiencing low driver yielding durhing enforcement operations.

HSRC conducted a program evaluation in 2018 and found that Watch for Me NC reduced county-wide pedestrian crashes from 2012 to 2017.[1] Compared to counties without participating communities, total pedestrian crashes fell by 12.8 percent, nighttime crashes were reduced by 21.7 percent, and failure to yield crashes decreased 9.5 percent.

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Resources

[1]Saleem, T., B. Lan, R. Srinivasan, L. Sandt, K. Blank, and S. Blank. (2018). Crash Based Evaluation of the Watch for Me NC Program. North Carolina Department of Transportation, Research Project No. 2018-38. Raleigh, NC. https://www.watchformenc.org/wp-content/up-loads/2019/02/2018-38-Final-Report-NCDOT-WFMEVAL.pdf. Last accessed April 30, 2020.