1. Texans Buckling Up in Big Numbers, TTI Survey Finds

Texans are among the most safety-conscious drivers in the United States, according to results of a statewide safety belt–use survey conducted by TTI.

In the 2008 survey, observers determined that an estimated 91.2 percent of all drivers and front-seat passengers in Texas buckled up. It’s the third year in a row that a 90 percent usage level has been reached. (A total of 11 states and Puerto Rico achieved safety belt–use rates of 90 percent in 2007.)

“Texas first hit the 90 percent mark in 2006,” says Katie Womack, senior research scientist with TTI’s Center for Transportation Safety. “When we first conducted a safety belt survey in 1985 in 12 Texas cities, only 14 percent of drivers and passengers were buckled up. But after the safety belt law was enacted in 1985, the usage rate jumped to 65 percent.”

Womack and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) attribute a steady rise in the compliance rate since 2002 to the nationwide Click It or Ticket campaign, which includes a series of public service announcements and stepped-up law enforcement efforts each May.

“We are extremely pleased with being recognized as one of the states with a 90 percent or higher safety belt use,” says Terry Pence, director of TxDOT’s Traffic Safety Section. “Although I
think the figures are impressive in a state this size, we realize that we still have some work to do, especially with pickups.”

The survey conducted by TTI indicated that drivers and passengers of pickup trucks are the least likely to use a safety belt. An estimated 88 percent of pickup drivers and 78 percent of their passengers use them. According to Pence, future media campaigns will focus on increasing safety belt use in pickups.

The annual safety belt survey uses funds provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and administered by TxDOT. According to NHTSA, safety belt use doubles the chances of surviving a serious crash.

In Texas, 190 sites in 22 counties are observed by TTI employees who conduct the survey each year by noting safety belt use for drivers and front seat passengers.

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2. Passing Stopped School Buses Common, Dangerous

Some Texas school bus drivers dread this time of year. Many of them witness motorists illegally zipping by them as they pick up or drop off children along their routes. Pick-ups and drop-offs are the most dangerous times of the day for the estimated 1.4 million Texas children who ride a bus to school. Yet, very few motorists are ticketed for the offense, known as a “stop-arm violation.” In most cases, a law-enforcement officer must witness the violation in order to write a citation.

TTI researchers are determining just how widespread the problem is, but they already have a pretty good idea. A survey of school bus drivers conducted by the Texas Department of Public Safety about two years ago revealed 12,850 stop-arm violations on that one day.

“The problem is serious and seems to be getting worse,” says Patricia Turner, associate research scientist with TTI’s Center for Transportation Safety. “The figures indicate that the potential for death and injury is extremely high.”

Full story:
http://tti.tamu.edu/infofor/media/feature.htm

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3. Headquarters Building Takes Shape

The TTI State Headquarters and Research Building is taking shape. In August, Vaughn Construction Company laid the concrete foundation and erected the columns for the first two floors of the three-story building. The framework for the third floor has begun.

“You may have noticed construction of a wall mock-up not far from the Gilchrist back doors,” says Holly Crenshaw, manager of Facilities, Safety and Support Services. “The precast panels have been erected, and framing, waterproofing and masonry work will follow. This process provides a close-up sample of the wall construction and how these components fit together. Of course, waterproofing is paramount!”

In September, the construction crew will begin the building’s steel work and wall framing. In October, construction of the concrete pads for the generator and transformer will begin. Completion is scheduled for fall 2009.

View real-time construction photos:
http://tti.tamu.edu/facilities/?loc_id=3506

4. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Ryan Alberson, Graduate Assistant Research (EDV)
Syam Kumar Kochyil Sasidharan Nair, Graduate Assistant Research (BDV)

10 Years

Marcus Brewer, Assistant Research Engineer (FRD)

20 Years

Beverly Kuhn, Senior Research Engineer (DDV)
5. TTI Kicks Off State Employee Charitable Campaign

The Texas A&M University System’s State Employee Charitable Campaign (SECC) kicked off on September 1. TTI’s goal for the campaign, which runs through October 31, is $19,978.

Helping with the campaign this year, said Terri Parker, campaign chair, is a great group of TTI staff members. “I am honored to work with such an enthusiastic committee of TTI colleagues on the campaign this year,” Parker said. “TTI has a terrific service-oriented culture.”

TTI staff working on SECC in addition to Parker are:

- Vice chair: Chris Sasser
- Unit coordinators: Stacey Alejandro, Teresa Boriski, Linda Chatham, Bonnie Duke, Glenda Evans, Jessica Franklin, Liz Holick, Chris Sasser and Nancy Stratta
- Urban office coordinator: Becca Simons
- Collective fundraising coordinators: Susie Catalina, Kerry Fillip, Rebecca Haug, Maria Medrano and Becca Simons
- Graphics support: John Hobbs

“I encourage everyone to support the campaign,” Parker said. “It is easy to give through the SECC website. The committee is also planning some fundraisers that everyone will have an opportunity to participate in,” she said.

Employees can give via payroll deduction or a one-time contribution in two ways:

- electronically via the SECC website at [http://tamus.edu/secc/](http://tamus.edu/secc/)
- by completing their campaign form and turning it in to their unit coordinator.

Based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the Habitat for Humanity interest cards at TTI Day last spring, the 2009 TTI Day Committee has chosen Habitat for Humanity as our 2009 TTI Day charity. The TTI Day Charitable Committee will plan some events with Habitat throughout the year to lead up to TTI Day.

“As a part of this effort, TTI employee contributions to Habitat for Humanity through the SECC campaign can be counted toward our total TTI Day contribution,” Parker said. “Of course, charitable giving is a deeply personal choice, so this is only an option.”
Also, Texas A&M University President Elsa Murano has announced an early bird drawing for two 50-yard-line tickets to the Texas A&M vs. Miami football game on September 20, along with two pre-game buffet tickets. TTI employees who donate to the campaign by September 12 will be eligible for this drawing.

6. TTI in the News

There have been numerous mentions of TTI and our experts in recent media reports. Here are links to some of the stories.

Cable barriers catching on in Texas (Fort Worth Star-Telegram) August 25

A good area for commuters (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) August 25

Back-to-school congestion (Fort Worth Star-Telegram) August 23

Best commuter cars (Forbes.com) August 22

Border issues examined (Border Trade Alliance Border Blog) August 20

Secure border project (KVIA-TV) August 18

Measuring miles driven (Slate.com) August 15

Magnet school buses (Austin American-Statesman) August 13

Americans driving less (USA Today) August 13

Teleworking increases (Leesburg Today) August 12

Moving closer to work (Providence Journal) August 12

Central Expressway HOV lanes (CBS 11 TV) August 11

New Orleans infrastructure: Carpool lanes (New Orleans City Business) August 11

The automobile and freedom (World Net Daily) August 7
7. TAMRF Featured at Research Development Seminar

Eight staff members from the Texas A&M Research Foundation (TAMRF) participated in a Research Development Seminar on August 20. The seminar highlighted the services provided by the TAMRF and introduced the staff members responsible for working with TTI.

“TTI has enjoyed an excellent longstanding working relationship with the TAMRF,” noted Associate Agency Director Katie Turnbull. “This relationship is even more critical now as we focus on diversifying our research portfolio. Working together, we can accomplish TTI’s research diversification goals.”

Jane Zuber, associate vice president in the pre-award section, explained the history of the TAMRF, which is an independent nonprofit corporation. “Our job is to supply administrative support to researchers, so you have our full attention,” Zuber noted.

TAMRF staff members outlined the various services provided, including proposal services, contract negotiations, project management and support operations. They noted the close working relationships with TTI staff in the Research Development Office and Business Office, as well as with researchers.

The seminar will be presented again on Wednesday, October 1, from noon to 1:00 p.m. in room 102 of the Gibb Gilchrist Research Building.

Texas A&M Research Foundation website: http://rf-web.tamu.edu/
8. Texas Landscape Highlighted in Schutt Retirement Party

Crediting him with making Texas roadsides look good, friends and colleagues within TTI and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) honored Assistant Research Scientist and Landscape Architect Jim Schutt after 20 years with the Institute. During the reception, a slide show of some of his work was displayed on an overhead projector.

“The roadsides of Texas would not look the same if it weren’t for Jim Schutt,” said Beverly Storey, a coworker and Environmental Management Program manager. “You’ve made us all look good, and we appreciate that.”

Schutt’s retirement party included humorous stories from the people who worked with him for two decades, and a plaque presentation from Agency Director Dennis Christiansen. “The contributions from Jim Schutt have been significant. This is a bittersweet occasion for us,” Christiansen said in presenting Schutt with a clock/plaque. Christiansen joked that the presentation should be hurried along “because at this very moment, the clock is right.”

“All of a sudden, you turn around and 20 years have gone by,” Schutt told the crowd. “I wouldn’t have traded a day of it. I worked with a great group of people. Thanks for everything.”

Schutt officially retired from TTI in June.

9. Successful Interactive Certification Program Runs Its Course

After nearly eight years and hundreds of participants taught, TTI Communications’ most successful interactive course has been retired by its sponsor, the International Right of Way Association (IRWA), as it adapts its curriculum to a changing work force.

IRWA began working with TTI Communications in 1997 to translate its two-day, lecture-based certification program into an electronic format to lessen participants’ travel costs associated with taking the traditional course. The course’s
The purpose is to teach right-of-way agents the nuts and bolts of right-of-way acquisition, with a focus on effective research strategies and successful negotiations with property owners. Completion of the course enabled certification for IRWA members.

The CD-ROM course featured video-based property negotiations, QuickTime virtual reality property walkabouts, land-plotting and description-testing mechanisms, and a web-based certification procedure. Students could work through the course’s 10 modules at their own pace, and even leave the program and pick up where they left off if they needed to.

“In many ways this has been the flagship interactive educational product for TTI Communications,” explains Communications Director Richard Cole, who co-designed the architecture and, along with Mark Coppock, programmed the course’s interactivity. “Cutting edge at the time, many of its features are now standard fare in interactive instruction.”

A second CD-ROM contained a fully indexed and searchable Adobe® Acrobat® course manual enhanced by electronic forms and links to World Wide Web sites that directly support right-of-way subject areas. Michelle Benoit and Chris Pourteau, who also managed the project, adapted original course materials to create the interactive manual.

Since the course’s delivery in October 2000, IRWA has distributed more than 800 sets to right-of-way agents worldwide. Originally designed with a five-year lifespan, the course served its purpose much longer.

“When this course was completed and for the next several years, it was a key education initiative that allowed students the opportunity to obtain right-of-way education at their own pace,” explains David W. Sinclair, vice president for Wilbanks Resources Corporation. Sinclair served as IRWA’s technical expert during project development. “I’ll always appreciate the creativity and professionalism exhibited by the TTI team when the course was created.”
TTI research projects often produce software programs that require an accompanying user’s manual. Like many writing projects, beginning with a blank screen for a user’s manual can be daunting. TTI Communications has developed a template file that can help you with that first big step.

The new template file on the editorial resources page of TTINet gives you a basic format and predefined word-processing styles. It also provides a potential outline for your manual with suggestions for what types of content to include in chapters and sections. It contains a general guide only, and you will want to add, delete, rearrange or rename sections as your needs dictate.

The template file starts out with an optional cover design for your manual. The cover contains placeholder information where you can complete the title of your document, a deliverable number, authors and affiliations, and the date. The cover design is flexible enough that you could use it for other types of documents that do not require a standard cover if you so choose.

The template includes a technical report documentation page (TRDP) following the cover. A TRDP is used with most Federal Highway Administration and Texas Department of Transportation documents. If you are creating a user’s manual for a different sponsor, you can easily change the information on the TRDP, eliminate or combine pages in the front matter, or change file content as appropriate.

The template suggests a Quick Start chapter for users that are already familiar with your software program or need to get started using it right away. Then it provides chapter ideas for subsequent information that will walk a software user through your program in as much detail as you need.
After you check out the new template, feel free to send any suggestions for improving it to Rhonda Brinkmann or Michelle Benoit in TTI Communications.

Editor’s Corner is written by Rhonda Brinkmann, research editor in TTI Communications. Rhonda is happy to respond to requests for column topics.

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11. Reminders/Calendar

September 3–5 — 2008 ITS Texas Annual Meeting
   Austin, Texas
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/its08/

September 7–9 — 13th International HOV/HOT Systems Conference
   Minneapolis, Minn.
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/hov08/

October 14–15 — 2008 Transportation Short Course
   College Station, Texas
   Registration required
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tsc08/

November 27–28 — Thanksgiving holiday

December 24–January 2 — Christmas–New Year’s holiday

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CenterLine is a production of TTI Communications. We encourage your comments and suggestions for articles about TTI people and research efforts. Please send email to news@ttimail.tamu.edu or call Rick Davenport at (979) 862-3763.